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BUNDLE OF TROUBLES  
AND  
OTHER TARHEEL TALES



# BUNDLE OF TROUBLES AND OTHER TARHEEL TALES

BY WORKERS OF THE WRITERS' PROGRAM  
OF THE WORK PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION  
IN THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

EDITED BY W. C. HENDRICKS

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1943

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

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## Introduction

"WHEN DEZ FOY came to our plantation as a bound Negro boy, he was ten or twelve years old. Dez's father, for some infraction of the law, had been assessed a heavy fine, which he was unable to pay. My father paid the fine and for compensation took Dez until he should become twenty-one years of age. The indenture provided that father should feed, clothe, and shelter Dez, for which Dez was to work on the plantation.

"Dez was in bad condition when he arrived. He was thin, almost to emaciation, and his skin was ashy from malnutrition and infested with scabies. Uncle Noah took him to the back yard, stripped and scrubbed him with strong lye soap, and anointed him with a mixture of lard and sulphur. His old rags were burned; he was given clean clothes, assigned to a place in the quarters, and put on regular rations.

"Dez's kinky-matted head was as full of stories as his skin had been alive with the itch. He must have heard the tales from his kinsfolk, who had done considerable migrating. After Dez was sixteen, he was permitted to take to the road during the summers as the driver of the tobacco wagon, delivering plug and smoking tobacco from the small manufacturers to storekeepers. Besides driving and caring for the horses, Dez's duties included building campfires, cooking, and guarding the wagon while his master engaged in missions of a business or social nature. Around campfires, in country stores, and on the road his stock of lore expanded.

"Our home in Madison had the kitchen set off from the house in old plantation style. There was a large fireplace in the living room, and smaller fireplaces in the bedrooms

and kitchen. These crackled with burning logs all winter. After supper, when the dishes had been washed and Aunt Bëtzannë häd' gone to the quarters, we children would gather around the kitchen fire, where Dez thrilled us with his 'oncommon tales.' Up in the attic the rats were scurrying about, hiding corn filched from the cribs or feeding troughs. 'Jes lissen to them rats a-playin' ball up thar—got a game o' ball up thar with that cawn.' We conjured visions of one-o-cat, with rats swinging at the pitched corn and racing around bases.

"Another interruption of Dez's tales came with the hissing and sizzling of green logs burning in the fireplace. 'Jes lissen to that worm in that stick o' wood, cryin' 'cause he's burnin' up.' Sometimes Dez skimmed off the white foam oozing from the end of the log with his gingercake-colored finger and threw it against the sooty chimney-back. We thought it was gravy stewed out of the worm's fat body while, trapped in the log, he screamed the whistle we had come to associate with his fearful disintegration.

"As Dez spun his tales we would gorge ourselves with popcorn, and when the popcorn was gone we finished off with parched field corn, roasted in the three-legged iron skillet upon whose lid we piled embers to hasten the roasting.

"Sometimes one of us choked on a grain. This would occasion the interpolation of the tale of the girl who came to an untimely demise under conditions somewhat similar:

I tuk my gal to the ball las' night  
But hit war too late—uh,  
A turkey bone run down her eye  
An' she choked to deff on tatuh.

"One tale that never wearied us was of the Tar Baby, and this I discovered in print, and famous, long after we

heard it from Dez at the fireside. The story of the guinea fowl, and its song of 'pot-rack, pot-rack,' I cannot for the life of me recall. Many of the companion critter stories were brought back to my memory when I began reading books, but some of Dez's tales, so far as I know, have never been in print. And so, to the accompaniment of frequent punching of the logs (to see the Yankees fly up the chimblly), Dez would tell his tales as we children sat enthralled.

"Aunt Bettzanne, too proud to admit of being a 'free niggah,' but who always wore gingham checks to distinguish herself from those in homespun Negro cloth, was a storyteller in her own right, as was her husband Uncle Noah."

Thus, from her own memory and by consulting her fellow-townsmen, Nancy Watkins reconstructed such tales as "The Headless Hant" and "Cinduh Seed in You Pocket." Katherine Palmer, on the other hand, solicited tales from some of the best tellers (as sure as Chatham's a good county), of which she found many, and "Jenny-Mule," "A Night at Pickey's," "Miss Nannie," and "Thankful for Blessings" were selected from the large number she was able to collect.

"Blood Apples" is a composite of the same tale which Adyleen G. Merrick heard from two sources. "Bear Hunt in Reverse," as told by Travis Jordan, harks back to Munchausen, but the story of "Trocea," the Croatan Indian, is vouched for as true by its narrator.

If "Bundle of Troubles" has seen the light of publication (and some say they recall the plot), this fact was unknown to W. E. Hennessee, or to Harry Hobson, from whom Hennessee heard the tale. Mary A. Hicks recorded some of her stories from memory; others were unearthed in her grubbing. Three of them, "Pot of Gold," "Old Skinny," and "Rode by Witches," are typical Carolina hant stories.



while "The Sharpest Saw" is a plain whopper with scant trimmings.

On Tidewater and swamp, back in remote mountain coves, even in urban and industrial centers, the telling of tales has never died out in North Carolina. Stories of witches, ghosts, and queer characters, tall tales, and hunting and fishing yarns are still told around the lingering country store, within the railed bar between court sessions, before family firesides, and around hunters' campfires. Old tales are passed along and new ones concocted.

To collect and preserve some of these tales, workers of the North Carolina Writers' Project visited storytellers in their communities and recorded the tales. More than two hundred were collected and written down. The stories came from farmers, elderly porch-whittlers, housewives, Negro men and women, merchants, and many others. The tellers had one thing in common—they were not "literary."

In recording the stories of ghosts and hants, the collectors noted an interesting distinction between white and Negro tellers of such tales. While the former were likely to have their tongues in their cheeks in the telling, the latter usually professed sincere belief in what they told, no matter how improbable the alleged facts might sound to white ears.

No doubt many of these stories have been published in some form or other; we have evidence on a few. Sometimes the tale appeared from different sections of North Carolina in varied forms. Some are common elsewhere in the country, but many appear to be strictly native.

The selection of stories for this volume was made with a view to provide a variety of themes and treatment. Although editing was necessary, the tales, in substance, stand as they came from our field workers.

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BUNDLE OF TROUBLES  
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## Bundle of Troubles

One night Mose went to bed 'bout bowed down with his troubles. Seem like all of 'em was a-hoppin' on him at oncet. He turned and twisted, but by'n by he went to sleep and then he had the dream.

Seem like, in the dream, ever'body had all a-sudden started miratin' and fussin' 'bout their troubles. Seem like they couldn't talk 'bout nothin' else. Fin'ly, the debbil, he got tard of all this loose talk 'bout troubles, caze most of 'em was blamed on him. Then one Sadday, 'thout nobody 'spectin' him, he 'peared uptown, jes as the streets was most crowded, and he rung a bell to call all they 'tensions to him.

When ever'body gathered 'round, he say like this:

"I bin hearin' a powerful lot 'bout all you folkses troubles. Yo'all thinks you is got more troubles as anybody. And I's a-gittin' mighty tard a-hearin' 'bout nothing else. Yo'all nussin' you troubles so hard you ain't got no time for no real sinnin'.

"I tell you what I's a-gonna do. I's a-gonna take up all of you troubles. Ever'body what has got troubles, jes wrop 'em up in a bun'le and bring 'em down to the depot check-room right away and I'll take 'em up and rid each and ever'body of you troubles. Now go home and wrop them troubles up and hurry down to the depot with 'em."

Well, it didn't take Mose more'n a minit to git home. He say he warn't runnin' 'zactly, but he was a-passin' a lot of folks what was.

He got the biggest thing he could find to hold all of his troubles, which was a big paper box with "Saunders Tripe" printed on the outside. Mose didn't think it would begin to hold all his troubles, but he started in a-packin' anyway.

First went in his old rhumatiz, and then his cawns.

"Yo'all bin hurtin' me for many the year," he say, "and I's sho glad to part company with you."

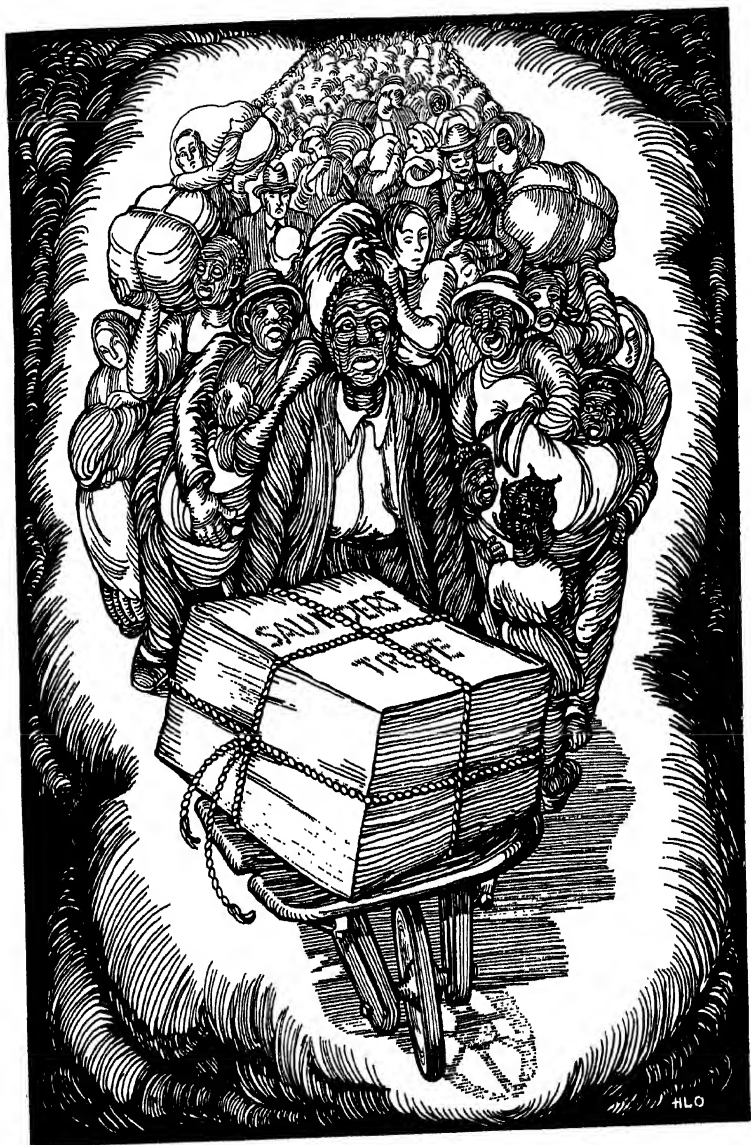
Then in went the lan'lord, and the sto'keeper what Mose owe for his fertilize. Then there was his back church dues what he hadn't paid, and that yeller gal over at Marse John Simmons' place. I don't know why he put her in, but he did. Then he throwed in his sore tooth, and his boy what got drunk all the time, and the old plow what never would foller a straight furrow. Then in went his old black skin, all his gray hair, and his wife's naggin', and the hatchet what would fly offen the handle. He throwed in his old mule, Bess, what kicked the daylight's outen him ever time she got a chancet, and that sportin' nigger what was a-slippin' 'round seein' his youngest gal.

He throwed in a heap more of tribalashuns, and it seem like the box jes wouldn't hold all of 'em, but there was allus a lil room at the top.

By'n by he had 'em all in, and then he took a big breaf and a piece of old plow line and tie them troubles up hard and fast in the box. He made a nice bun'le and throwed it on his wheelbar and started for the depot.

It took him a long time to git there, caze the streets was packed with folks all loaded down with bun'les. There was old Sis Tompkins what didn't anybody know ever had a trouble in her life, and what was allus a-laffin', and a-jokin', and a-goin' on. She was loaded down with sech a big bun'le that she had three of her lil gran'chillun a-helpin' her tote it. There was the preacher with a good-size load. There was even white folks, and Mose was surprise at that, but they seem to have the biggest bun'les of all. There was old Cunnel LeRoy, the biggest man in the town; even he had a bun'le. It warn't a very big bun'le, 'bout the size of a dozen eggs wropped up, but it was a bun'le jes the same.

When Mose got to the depot, the checkroom was piled







up to the ceilin' with bun'les, and the debbil had three-four of his imps a-helpin' him with the checkin'. Mose put down his bun'le, and a perlite lil imp put a check on it and handed Mose a stub.

"What fo' you gimme this check?" say Mose. "I don't want the bun'le back—no time, atall."

"Tain't you check," say the perlite lil imp. "It's somebody else's check. You see it's like this: Next Chusday all yo'all what's checked a bun'le of troubles comes back here with these checks and you gits somebody else's bun'le of troubles. Ever'one of you has been a-sayin' that you troubles was worser yit, so the Old Man he gonna let each'n of you trade and git somebody else's troubles."

"Well," say Mose. "I sho won't mind that. Mebbe I git some nice easy troubles like dander, or a good-lookin' wife, or too much money." And then he put out for home.

Long 'bout cain't-see time, when Mose was a-settin' on his porch, he got to thinkin' 'bout the propersition, and the more he think 'bout it the lessen he likes it. He 'members somethin' 'bout old Cunnel LeRoy, and some of the other folks, too. Seem like it jes warn't workin' out like he had thunk. By'n by he got down his hat and his walkin' stick and he went down to the depot to see how things was a-comin'. When he got there, first thing he heered was somebody laffin, and he looked 'round the corner of the pile of bun'les and there was the debbil and the imps a-laffin' fit to kill. Seem like they had jes heered the bestest joke anybody ever told.

"Now look here," say Mose to hisself. "When the debbil gits to laffin', somebody bound to git the worst of it. I ain't never heered of the Old Boy a-doin' anybody a favor yit lessen he gits the best of the deal."

So he went up to the debbil, perlite-like, and he say, "Mister Debbil, mebbe I make a mistook today. I left a big bunch of troubles with you, but I ain't so sure now that

I wants to part with 'em. They bin with me so long I thinks that I's growed kinda fond of 'em. Wonder could I get 'em back 'thout nobody axin' me no questions?"

The debbil he open his mouf wide and laff. And when he laff it was worsen as when he frowns. His eyes didn't have no whites in 'em and was all shiny like they bin polished. His funny skin was a-twitchin', and his tail was a-lashin' back'rds and for'rds.

"Br'r Mose," he say, 'tween laffs, "I's powerful sorry to tell you, but the check for you bun'le is in somebody else's hands now, and I don't see how you can git it back."

"Well, then," say Mose, "I won'er iffen you can show me what kinda lookin' bun'le this here check of mine calls for?"

"To be sho," say the Old Boy, and he looked at the check, and went 'round comparin' it with the checks on the bun'les.

"Here it is," he fin'ly say, and he holds up the lil bun'le of troubles of Cunnel LeRoy. "Looks like a mighty nice lil bun'le of troubles you gonna git Chusday, Br'r Mose. I congratulates you. Jes a lil bun'le of white folks troubles. That ought'n worry a old darkey like you."

When Mose see that bun'le he scairt most to death.

"Please, suh, Mister Debbil," he say, "please, suh, gimme my old bun'le of troubles back. That's it right over there by that lil green imp, in the box marked with the tripe. I bin a-thinkin' it over and my troubles ain't so bad. I kinda miss the ole cawns, and the rhumatiz, and the game tooth. By rights I owes the lan'lord, and the sto'keeper, and it wouldn't be right not to pay 'em. That yeller gal ain't gonna bother me no more, caze she's gittin' crazy 'bout somebody else. I kin take a firmer hand with the chillun, and I don't mind gittin' mule-kicked, or throwed by the plow, and I kinda misses the old woman's naggin' already. To tell the truf, I don't believe they was troubles after all."

jes lil worries, and I misses 'em tubble. Won't you please to give 'em back, suh?"

The debbil he laff agin, and he laff and laff. And Mose begin to back off a lil way. Then the debbil look mad, and he say: "Take you bun'le of troubles, Br'r Mose," he say, "but don't you ever let me hear you fussin' 'bout 'em agin, or I'll give you some sho-nuff troubles."

Mose grab up his troubles and toss 'em up on his shoulder like they was no more'n a box of feathers. It didn't take no wheelbar to git 'em away from that depot.

Why didn't Mose take old Cunnel LeRoy's troubles when he had a chancet? I axes him that.

Mose say he see a coffin in that bun'le, and he 'members jes in time that the Cunnel's trouble was a lil old cancer of the stummick.

## Pappy's 'Tater Patch

My pappy was the farmin'est feller what ever lived. He raised a big family of young'uns and it took a lot of scrambling to keep us all fed. Our land was rough, all 'cept a little patch of bottom, and we kept the bottom farmed to death.

Behind the house was a little knob that was durn nigh straight up into the air. It was all covered with thicket and rocks and warn't fit for nothing but hoot owls and snakes. Looked just like a monster funnel turned upside down.

As us young'uns got bigger and got to eating heartier, pappy began to worry about how he could feed us all. Fin'ly he told us at supper one night that he was aiming to clear the knob and plant it with taters. Now pappy never stood for no funny business, but we young'uns and ma couldn't help from laughing at him, and axing him did he mean to burn out the brush and shoot in the seed taters with his shotgun. All he had to say back was that we'd start clearing the knob come morning.

He got us all started grubbing and toting rocks offen the knob. I'll swear, that knob was so steep we'd dig in with our toes, and when we'd slip there was no stopping till we hit the bottom. Ever one of us was all skinned and bruised up by night. But pappy held us to it for about a week, and at last we had that old knob skinned clean as a peeled onion.

Then pappy throwed a rope over his shoulder, took the axe and a big stake, and inched his way to the top. At the very top he drove in the stake, good and solid. He tied one end of the rope to the stake and slid down, bringing the other end back to the bottom. Then he hitched the old mule to the plow, brought her up to the foot of the

knob, and tied the loose end of the rope around the mule. Pappy got a good holt on the handles of the plow, gee-hawed the old mule, and started plowing a furrow at the bottom of the knob. As the mule went round, the upper end of the rope wrapped 'round the stake, and that worked the mule and the plow and pappy up the knob. Pappy had to lean over until his right ear 'most touched the ground, and the right-hand pocket of his jeans scooped up dirt.

Well, pappy fin'ly got the knob plowed up. Then he got us young'uns together, filled our pockets with tater eyes, and each one of us picked out a row and started snaking along on our bellies, planting them tater eyes. The first night it rained, and all the tater eyes washed out to the foot of the knob. Next day we did it all over. Fin'ly they took root and began to grow.

When them taters was high enough to cultivate, we wondered how pappy would get 'em hoed. We weren't long in finding out. Pappy got out his rope again, tied one end to the stake on top of the knob, and tied a knot in the britches belt of each of us young'uns and started us hoeing. We were strung out up that durn knob like a Maypole dance, but it worked and we got the taters hoed.

That was the richest ground I ever heard tell of. When the taters started growing, humps were pushed up all over the knob like as if the knob had been stung by a million big hornets. Pappy was so proud of that tater patch he didn't pay no mind to the rest of the place atall.

When it come time to harvest the taters, we all got baskets and towbags and pappy hitched up the old mule to the plow and started plowing out the bottom row. The taters had growed so close together that they was resting on each other. When the bottom row came out, it was like knocking the end gate outen a load of sand. Them taters just started rolling down the knob like a landslide, and

*Pappy's 'Tater Patch*

there was the durnest rumbling and roaring I ever heard. Pappy let out a yell, unhitched the mule, and hollered: "Ever man for hisself." We all took to the tall timber until the tater slide was over.

Them taters covered the ground all 'round the house ten-feet deep. We had to dig a tunnel to the house and outbuildings. Ever'thing was buried 'neath taters. We worked all the rest of the fall and winter carting them taters to market.

We made enough money to buy a farm in the valley, and we all worked on pappy to move so's we young'uns could get to school. He wouldn't hear to leaving. He sent ma and us young'uns to the valley, and gave us money, but he never would move away from that wonderful tater patch.

Pappy would come to see us 'casionally, and he got so he leaned way over on the right side when he walked, and I noticed that his right ear always was dirty and his right-hand jeans pocket always had dirt in it. Ever fall about the same time we'd hear a rumbling from the direction of the mountain farm and we knowed that pappy was harvesting his taters.

## The Stranger's Last Possum

Speaking of possum dawgs puts me to mind ole Rip what Annie's brother Ben oncet owned. He war the Gawd-awfulest possum dawg you ever seed when he war a youngun, but when he growed up he jes nach'ly spoiled or something. Ben never could figger hit out. Used to carry him out in the piney-woods of a night, Ben did, and directly he'd hear the critter a-sniffing 'longside a tree, but when Ben'd git there he'd be gone on sommers else. Like to break Ben up, hit did, him not ketching airy a possum and his table meat a-running low, and hit got so he couldn't sleep none 'cept at night.

Waal, sir, Ben he figgered and he figgered and he tried to swap the critter off, but wouldn't nobody have him. And jes 'bout the time Ben'd give clear out of idees, he run onto a tourist feller what'd come to these yere parts from sommers up No'th to hunt some during possum season. He warn't much of a hand to larn our ways, and he war needing a dawg, and anyhow he war a stranger, so Ben give him a uncommon tale and the next thing old Rip war hisn.

Gawdamighty, but that there trade shore blowed Ben up! And when he went and showed that feller's money to his ole woman she liked to fell offen the aide of her cheer. "Five dollars!" she yelt, "I mought of knowed ye'd go and do something scand'lous some day," and with that she 'peared fitten to drop in her tracks, so Ben took his tongue outen his head and told her the sarcumstances.

Ben he laid 'round after that, not paying strict mind to the doings of the stranger, till one day his brother Charley rid over and told him as how that feller war a-catching more possums with ole Rip than a mortal man could tote outen the woods, and said hit mought be a good idee to



follow the stranger 'round atter dark to see how he was a-doing hit.

Waal, sir, come night Ben and Charley snuck off in the piney woods and hid 'emselves in the bresh, and purty soon along come that there stranger, ole Rip a-follering him behind. Directly they hit the path 'longside the crick, Rip he took the lead, and all to oncet Ben and Charley seed Rip grob up a stick of wood in his mouth and set hit agin a tree. Then he went on to 'nother tree and done the same to hit. And right behind him follered that tourist feller, a-looking for the sticks, and when he'd see one a-setting agin a tree he'd climb up and fetch down a possum.

Right then and there Ben seed he had went and traded off the smartest dawg in the whole country, and he 'lowed he must of bin uncommon looney not to of catched on to ole Rip's smartness in the fust place. He war so plumb addled that when he went home and got in bed he clear fergot and took his clothes off and like to froze before he got 'em on agin.

Waal, sir, fer the longest time Ben jes set 'round the house a-thinking and a-studying and a-studying and a-thinking, when all to oncet he got a idee. He rid over to the stranger's place and fixed hit to go hunting with him that night. He come by on the way back and got me, and come dark we got a soon start fer the woods. Ole Rip and that there tourist feller war a-waiting fer us when we got there. Ole Rip did what Ben said he seed him do, and directly we gathered up more possums'n I'd ever seed at one time before, and we was a-starting fer home agin when all a-suddint Ben, he hollered out, "Looky there, mister, there's one we slighted," and shore 'nough there war a stick a-setting agin a sourwood tree.

Waal, sir, in a minute that there stranger was a-skinning up the tree, Ben and me a-holding on to the possums, when all to oncet he slid outen there jes two jumps and a holler

in front of a polecat. Man and boy, sech a stink you ain't never smelt! And him a-coming up on that critter from behind, too!

Waal, sir, that feller didn't take the time to even hold his nose, but jes retched down and fetched ole Rip a kick on the behind. "Dang blast your wuthless hide!" he hol-lered out. "Ye've done went and made a purty fool of me!" And with that he pulled ouden these yere parts and we never heerd of him agin.

Ole Rip? Why, he went high-tailing hit back to Ben's place, like Ben figgered he would iffen he war mistreated. You see, hit war Ben what put that polecat in the tree and set the stick agin hit in the fust place!

## Trocea

Trocea had worked for my daddy before I was born, and the memories of my childhood are all tied up with the handsome half-breed. There wasn't anything about the forests and swamps of Onslow that he didn't know. He could shoot an arrow straighter than most men can shoot a rifle, and with a rifle it seemed he never missed. None of the Negroes on the place would venture into the heart of the swamp, and an ironclad parental rule forbade any of us youngsters from even entering the borders.

Too many men had gone into the swamp never to return. They'll still tell you about this man and that man who followed his bear dogs too far. Sometimes the dogs would get back, but there was no way telling where the man had slipped into the slimy ooze that brought death and burial at the same time.

The stories some of the young bucks told of narrow escapes in the swamp made my hair stand on end. A foot placed on what looked like a hummock of hard grass, and down a man would go. No bottom to the muck, but if luck was with you or your time wasn't up, there'd be a log for you to grab onto and pull out.

The swamp was full of critters. You could hear the bull alligators trumpeting in the night. Daddy said he never believed an alligator would kill a man, but they sure would get a pig or a dog and pull him under. I think I'd take a chance with a bull alligator before I would with a cotton-mouth moccasin. I've seen moccasins in the ditches around the farm that were four feet long, and plenty of people in lower Craven have died from being bitten. I have run onto them, barefooted, myself, and it's a wonder I didn't get bitten, but I guess luck was with me.

Trocea knew the swamp like the back of his hand. He had a high opinion of himself, and I think that's why everybody else thought well of him. A Croatan Indian is what he said he was, and he wouldn't have no truck with the Negroes around the place. He was tall and wiry and handsome, with coal-black hair that he wore straight across his forehead, bangs-fashion, and straight across the back where it hung loose, down to his shoulders. His cheek bones were high like an Indian's, but his skin, instead of being coppery or any shade of coffee, was a yellowish cream, and gleaming in his yellow face was a pair of deepset eyes—the bluest I've ever seen.

He must have had white blood in him—Negro too, maybe—but he didn't count of nothing but being an Indian. He was silent-footed and close-mouthed. He seldom spoke until spoken to, and he refused to live in a house.

Trocea had a tent that he would pitch first one place, then another, but he always lived by himself. On the high land daddy raised cotton, Irish potatoes, and some peanuts. We raised some corn and other grain too, but mostly cotton, corn, and potatoes. During farming season Trocea hired out by the day to my daddy, but if the wind was right he would lay off a day or two to fish.

Trocea brought in fish every time he went fishing. Nobody knew his methods or exactly where he went, because he always went alone. In winter he would hunt and trap, selling deer and bear meat and trading the skins and furs for supplies. I don't believe he ever bought any clothes—he just wore old makeshifts—loose trousers and a rough wool shirt, no hat, and seldom any shoes.

He worked in the field with the Negroes, but would never eat with them. When the Negroes came in from the field, they ate from a long table in the yard, but mother always kept a small table under a tree for Trocea, where he ate by himself. My mother respected Trocea, and he

worshiped her. He would work for my daddy, but refused everybody else in the neighborhood.

I don't know why Trocea took a liking to me, but maybe it was because I looked up to him so much. When I was twelve years old, I guess Trocea must have been about thirty. Anyway, all at once he began to notice me, and asked me to go hunting with him. He wouldn't think of taking me into the swamp—not then—but we went into the forest and he'd show me how to pick a squirrel off with the bow and arrow. He knew every tree, shrub, bird, and creature in the forest. He'd imitate the cries of the birds, and lead me to a fox's den, or a rabbit's burrow. He showed me the right way to handle a rifle, and what kind of bait to use for different kinds of fish, and he'd tell me about the moon and the wind, though there was so much that I couldn't remember half of it.

When I was sixteen, Trocea took me into the swamp for the first time. Looking back, I think that was the most exciting day in my life. I don't know how he could tell which clump of grass was safe to step on, which log was sound, and which vines would not pull out when you hung onto them. It seemed to me that he moved through the swamp by pure instinct, but I followed his every step and handhold.

In the spring and summer the swamp was a maze of beauty and terror. The great, gnarled cypress knees looked like huge monsters rising from the morass. Loop after loop of green vines swung from the trees, filled with masses of blooms of every color and shade. It seemed that every shrub and plant had flowers. Birds of bright plumage darted about, and as we moved along, numerous splashings told of creatures taking to the water at our approach. In places the growth was so dense there was scarcely any light and we were able to force our way through only with the

greatest exertions. Then we would come upon a broad expanse of water, sometimes a mile or more across.

There was something about the swamp that a man can feel but not describe. I feared it as a deadly thing, but I wanted to give myself to it—to wade through the muck . . . swim across the broad lakes . . . climb to the tops of the highest trees. Maybe Trocea felt this too, and maybe that's why he kept so much to himself and spent days in the swamp.

I made numerous trips into the swamp with Trocea and I got to know certain sections well enough to venture out by myself. There was a long arm of the swamp, perhaps a quarter of a mile wide, that lay between our place and the Andrews farm. By crossing the swamp here, I could save a five-mile trip around by the road.

My daddy and mother objected strenuously to my trips to the swamp, and daddy spoke to Trocea about it. After that we had to make our trips on the quiet. Trocea would come to the edge of the woods and call, "Whoo-whoo-oo-oo," like an owl. I would slip out the backdoor, sneak across the cotton patch and into the woods to meet him.

Well, I grew up, and the time came for me to leave the farm. When I was twenty-three, I went to Norfolk and got a job. Trocea still lived in a tent and worked on the farm. I know he hated to see me leave, but he didn't show it. He said, "Joe, all young birds have to try their own wings, but there's things you'll miss in the city. You'll learn new ways and new things, but you'll never forget the early morning sun trickling through the trees of the swamp."

I felt like a ten-year-old school boy, but I managed to keep a good face, and told Trocea I'd never forget what he had taught me and our good days together. That seemed to please him, and he held out his hand and said: "We meet again." I never knew him to say goodbye to anyone.

I didn't get home for four years, and then came a message saying father was very sick and wanted to see me. When I got off the train at the little station it was pitch dark and a drizzling rain was falling. I was disappointed that Trocea hadn't come to meet me with the buggy, but supposed he was needed at home with father. The station agent gave me a lightwood knot for a torch, and I set out on foot in the rain. I finally reached the edge of the swamp at the Andrews farm, and stopped to consider whether I should attempt to cross at night. I could save five miles, and I felt certain that with the torch I could find my way.

I picked up the path and struck into the swamp, holding the torch in front of me to distinguish the old foot-holds I had once known so well. I stepped from log to log, and on little hummocks. Beyond the small circle of my torch's light the darkness was an inky void, pressing so close it seemed to be suffocating me.

All went well until I began nearing the far side of the swamp when I jumped to a clump of grass and my feet sank. I felt the clammy slush of water about my ankles, and the muck yielding beneath my feet. I snatched at a trailing vine to save myself, and in doing so dropped the torch. To my horror I saw it sputter and sizzle out, leaving me in utter darkness, clinging to a swaying vine, with no foundation for my feet.

I have never experienced anything so terrible as the fear that shook me, and the conviction that death was upon me. The vine began giving way, and the ooze pressed upwards along the calves of my legs. I tried for a higher hold on the vine, and struggled to climb hand-over-hand, but portions of the vine broke in my grasp. Inch by inch I sank into the slimy muck. Now my thought was, not whether I could escape, for all hope had fled, but whether my body would ever be found. I thought of the moccasins and the alligators. I thought of the station agent who had given me

the lightwood knot, and I tried to remember whether I had told him that I might try to cross the swamp.

The water had reached my armpits, when suddenly, and close at hand, I heard the old "whoo-whoo-oo-oo," and I knew that Trocea—good old Trocea—had saved me. "Whoo-whoo-oo-oo," I called back, weakly, and then his breath was on my neck, his arms under my shoulders. I got my feet upon the hummock where he stood, and after resting a few minutes, followed his silent shadow out of the swamp and to my father's home.

My daddy was better, but he'd had a close call with a heart attack. He wanted to discuss the disposition of the farm, because he felt he wouldn't be able to carry on with the place any longer.

I told him that I owed my life to Trocea, and that I would have surely died in the swamp had not Trocea arrived just in time.

"Son," my daddy said, "it's strange that Trocea should have come to you tonight and led you to safety."

I replied that I didn't consider it so strange.

"Yes, it *is* strange," my daddy repeated, "because Trocea is dead. A tree fell on him and crushed the life out of him a week ago. We buried him at the edge of the wood."

I could only sit and stare. Come to think of it, Trocea hadn't spoken to me, and I hadn't really seen him in the pitchy darkness. But of one thing I am certain—I felt him there just as surely as I am alive today. I know that I owe my life to Trocea and that he rescued me.

There's a nice headstone on his grave, carved with the word "Trocea" and the date of his death. That's enough, I think. My brother has the farm now, and every time I go there for a visit I walk over to the grave by myself, and it seems that I can feel my old friend near me. Sometimes, from far off in the swamp I can hear the call of an owl—"Whoo-whoo-oo-oo."



# Cheesebox Church

Some folks 'cuses me of not bein' a religious man, and say I's not saved, and all that, jes on account I's perticular 'bout the kinda church I goes to. Iffen I could get to a good brick church I'd go ever Sunday and on prayer-meetin' night, too. But, they ain't nobody what's gwine a-get me in one of them rickety wooden tabernickles, and none of them lil old cheesebox churches what the darkies have in this here neighborhood. Jes look at this busted nose, and look at the place where they ain't no hair growin' on my haid! That comes from goin' into a lil old rickety wooden churchhouse, and I don't mean to git ketched that away agin. No, suh! Not me!

That was near ten y'ar ago, when I was a-livin' on Harricane Crick, a-workin' for Cap'n Pennybacker. They was a bunch of cullud folks what called 'emselfs the Black Saints of Possom Ridge, and they holds meetin's 'round wherever they finds a place, and fin'ly they gits up some cash money and decides to build 'emselfs a churchhouse.

They didn't git much cash money, and they had to make out best they could, and so they bought 'em some loblolly pine boards, and some tar paper, and some nails, and they puts up a lil old buildin' on Harricane Crick.

I reckon they was 'bout a hunner darkies what belongs to these Black Saints, and when they got that buildin' up what they calls a churchhouse, it look more like a big hen-house to me than a meetin'house. Anyhow they gits 'em a preacher of the name of Rev. Ambrose Ferebee, and they begins holdin' meetin's in that house.

The boards run up and down, and they warn't hardly any joists to hold 'em tergather. They nailed more boards

on for a roof, and then to keep the water and wind out, they went over the hull business, roof and sides, with tar paper, what they tacked on with big tin washers to keep the tacks from pullin' through.

The Rev. Ambrose Ferebee, he was a powerful preacher, and you could hear him a-yellin' and a-stompin' up on his platform for miles 'round. Some of the sistern got to work-in' on me, and 'suaded me to come to the meetin's. They was jes lil old wooden benches to set on, 'thout no backs to 'em, and they warn't no floor 'cept the dirt.

After the Rev. Ferebee done preached 'bout a month, he 'nounced one Sunday that they's a-gwine be a revival at the church, and that the Rev. Dooteronomy Simmons is a-com-in' to conduct it.

As I done say, the Rev. Ferebee was a pow'ful preacher, and he got a good pair of lungs, and he got a good stout pair of laigs to stomp on the platform, but he ain't in it with this here Rev. Dooteronomy Simmons when he get his first meetin' started.

This Rev. Dooteronomy stand still a long time on the platform, jes a-lookin' at the flock settin' on the benches, then he lift up his long skinny arm, and let out a yell like 'bout 'leben pinters a-screamin' all t'oncet. When he let out that yell, ever'body jump plum offen they bench, and by the time they git set down agin, the Rev. Dooteronomy is yellin' out a stream of preachin' faster'n a horse can run.

The Rev. was long and skinny, like I say, but he got a big barrel chest on him, what look like he's done been blowed up like a pouter pigeon. He'd take a great big breaf, and then he'd yell out them words, thick and fast, till all his breaf done gone. Then he'd stop and take another great big breaf, and light out agin. I never heerd such preachin' in my borned days.

First thing I know, folks settin' on they benches begun

weavin' back and forth, jes keepin' time to the preachin'. Then they begun to blow out they breafs while the Rev. Dooteronomy was talkin', and when the Rev. takes in a big breaf, all the folkses settin' there, they takes a big breaf, too.

The Rev. was preachin' 'bout sheep and goats, and he say that in this life they is two kinds of folks, sheep and goats. Then he takes a big breaf, and when he gits in the big breaf, he run on and wants to know who's gwine a-be the sheep, and who's gwine a-be the goats. When the Rev. runs out of breaf, the congergation say, all together, "Yea—Lawd," and then they all fills up with a big breaf jes like the Rev. done.

I heerd somethin' crackin', and I looks up, and I sees that ever time the folks takes a breaf together, the walls and the roof of the church suck way in. And when they all let's out they breaf, the walls and roof of the church bulge way out, jes like a rubber balloon bein' blowed up.

I knowed somethin' gwine a-happen, and I lets out a yell as loud as I could, but the folks jes look at me like I's a sinner gettin' grace, and then keeps on drawin' in and blowin' out with the Rev. And the walls and roof of the church keep suckin' and bulgin', a lil more each time.

Fin'ly the Rev. Dooteronomy stop daid still. He take a big breaf, and ever'body take a big breaf. He hold his breaf a minnit and ever'body hold they breaf a minnit, too. Then the Rev. yells out: "Who's gwine a-be the goats?"

Ever'body watch for him to let go his breaf, but he hold it a minnit, and then he let go, and ever'body let go, and then the walls of that there church blow plum out and the roof come bangin' down right on ever'body's haid.

They warn't nobody kilt, but they war a pow'ful lot of cracked haid in that congergation when they got 'em all fished out.

No, suh! Ennybody what wants to can go to one of these here tabernickles, or a cheesebox church, but not me. I goes to a good stout brick church or I don't goes to none, atall.

## Putting the Fixment on Mr. Bullfrog

Afore long I'll be a hunner year old. I's done had three good wives and twenty-two chillens. Four year ago, come the 'steenth of August, was the happiest day of my life. Seventeen of my chillens and they chillens all come home for a reunion, and we-all went to church together and fill six long benches at the meetin' house. The parson preach his sermon 'bout multiplyin' and replenishin' the earth. Sure made me feel proud. Then I remember 'bout Mr. Bullfrog, and how pride goeth afore a fall, and I humble myself.

I knows all about it, 'cause I understands wood critters' talk. I's spent most of my time in the woods, listenin' to the critters jabberin' 'mongst theyselfs. I knows what the he-bear say to the she-bear, and I knows what the she-bear say to her cubs. I knows what the mockin'bird singin' 'bout, and I can talk back to the coon and the possum, and rabbit talk is plum easy. Rabbits is the sassiest critters in the woods. I near bust my sides listenin' to they sassy lippin'. They's smart, and tricky, too.

Ole Mr. Bullfrog used to be a fine-lookin' gen'lemum—'bout the sportiest critter in the woods—but that was afore he shrivel up and afore his hind laigs got to be so much longer as his front laigs. I heerd the woods critters plottin' to put the fixment on Mr. Bullfrog, and I was there when his downfall come. I cain't say as I felt sorry for him, he was so stuck up with his own good looks and fine raiment.

When I was a boy, seem like I jes couldn't wait to get my breakfus afore I run off to the woods to watch the

critters and lissen to 'em talk over they business. They got so they didn't pay no mind to me atall. I never run after 'em, and never chunked no rocks at 'em, and never had no dog to worry 'em. I jes set on a log, or on the pond bank, and they go right ahead with they business. Sometimes I talk to 'em and they answer back.

Ole Mr. Bullfrog in them days didn't live in no water. He live on the land and he skeerder of the water than a white man is skeered of the itch. And Mr. Bullfrog didn't do no hoppin' 'round. He walk straight up on his two foots same as a man, and his arms is jes 'bout as long as his laigs. He stand 'bout a foot high. And biggoty—he was 'bout the biggotiest and high-steppinest critter I ever seed—and seem like all he think 'bout was his fine clothes.

I set on a rock manys a time and see him come struttin' through the woods all dressed up like a gov'nor or some-thin'. The long tails of his coat slap 'gainst the back sides of his knees when he walk. His vest was greener than the wings of a June bug; his shirt front was whiter than corn-starch, and his button shoes was black and shiny like a polished kittle.

I seen him come swaggerin' down the path with his head helt high, swingin' a birch cane and with his beaver hat settin' sidewise over his left ear. I seen all the women woods critters set up and take notice and make eyes at him when he pass by. But Mr. Bullfrog, he jes strut by in high feather, payin' no mind to the womenfolks atall. 'Twarn't till he see that purty lil Miss Muskrat that he change his notion.

I done already been watchin' Miss Muskrat. She set flirty-eyed on a stump, holdin' a red apple in her mouf. She all dressed up in a new fur coat and look so stylish that Mr. Bullfrog stop and swing off his beaver. He bow low to the ground, and he say:

"You turns my heart hind part before, Miss Muskrat, and

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it's tickin' like a love clock. Will you do me the honor to walk with me to the acorn tree down in the south woods?"

Now, I knows a muskrat likes acorns, and mebbe that was it, and mebbe Miss Muskrat feel the need for a walk, and mebbe somethin' else, anyhow I see Miss Muskrat flip offen the stump, shake out her coat, and take Mr. Bullfrog's arm, and away they goes to the south woods.

Ever day atter that I goes to the woods to watch the courtin', and I ain't never seen such courtin'. Seem like Mr. Bullfrog jes about bust hisself, he so puffed up, and Miss Muskrat got so airish 'cause Mr. Bullfrog pay her mind that she act like none the other woods folks good enuf for her to 'sociate with.

I could easy see that all this bumptiousness didn't set good with the other woods critters, and they begin gettin' together and talkin' 'bout Mr. Bullfrog and Miss Muskrat. I overheers 'em whilst this smart-aleck couple is off strollin' through the woods. The more they talks, the madder they-all gets, and they begin figgerin' how they can take him down offen his high-hoss. One atternoon they has a meetin' down in the sassyfras thicket on the east side of the ravine. When they sees me lookin' on, they shets up for a while; then when they agrees that I's all right, they goes ahead. Atter ever'boday say his say, Mr. Rabbit hop up on the stump and begin to talk.

He say he got a good idee worked out how he goin' to take Mr. Bullfrog down a peg or two, and he say he ain't got no use for that braggin', dressified dude nohow, 'cause all the time he makin' fun of his long ears, sayin' he got mule ears and they so long and stiff he can't wear no nice beaver hat like he do. Mr. Rabbit say he got in mind how to put the fixment on Mr. Bullfrog, but he goin' to keep it a secret till tomorrer night when they have a big 'lasses stew right here in the sassyfras thicket and ever'boday invited to come.

I was the first one at the thicket next night, and 'bout eight o'clock all the critters begin to come traipsin' in through the moonlight. They toted up bresh, made a fire, and set the 'lasses pot on to bile. The fire was a-burnin' and the 'lasses a-stewin' when here come Mr. Bullfrog, all dressed up fit to kill, and Miss Muskrat hangin' on one arm and him swingin' a bran' new gold-headed cane with tuther. He is all diked out in a new coat with long tails cuttin' a shin-dig along the calfs of his laigs; his beaver hat is settin' sideways over his left eye; his green vest is buttoned with silver dollars.

He sets Miss Muskrat down on a log and he starts struttin' to show hisself off, handin' out big talk. He laff at Mr. Rabbit, who was stirrin' the 'lasses, and say he better mind how he bend over the 'lasses pot else his mule ears so long mebbe they flop over and get swung by the fire.

Mr. Rabbit jes laff like he don't keer if Mr. Bullfrog poke fun at him. He praise Mr. Bullfrog and tell him how nice his new coat fits, and what fancy socks he got on, and how purty his necktie is, and Mr. Bullfrog jes puff up bigger as ever.

Mr. Rabbit wiggle his whiskers and wink at the other critters and jes keep on stirrin' the 'lasses. Atter a while he begins dishin' up the 'lasses, and settin' it 'round in the grass to cool so they can pull it to taffy, and all the critters was a-settin' 'round watchin' to see how Mr. Rabbit goin' to knock the biggotiness out of Mr. Bullfrog and dress him down.

In a minute Mr. Bullfrog come high-hattin' back by the pot a-twirlin' his cane and a-holdin' his head way back like the ground wasn't good enuff for him to look at. Right then Mr. Rabbit lean over and set a big bowl of hot 'lasses right on the path in front of Mr. Bullfrog, and afore Mr. Bullfrog know where he goin', he done stepped right in the middle of that bowl, and sink into the mess slap up to his



He give a yell and try to pull out, but when he get to liftin' one foot out tother sinks in deeper. All the woods critters come a-runnin', clappin' they hands together and laffin', and Mr. Rabbit pour more hot 'lasses in the bowl till it nigh up to Mr. Bullfrog's hips. Miss Muskrat begin jumpin' straight up and down, and yellin': "Take him out, take him out! He's my financy!" But don't nobody pay her mind.

Mr. Bullfrog drop his cane, take off his beaver and fling it in the bushes, then he goes to work pullin' on one laig, then on tuther, till he sweat all over, but the 'lasses done hold him fast. He take off his swallowtail coat and throw it on the ground, and tussel some more, but it don't do no good. He pull off his vest and shirt, and pull like a hoss. Miss Muskrat grab up a spoon and start dippin' the 'lasses outten the bowl. Atter a while, with all that pullin', Mr. Bullfrog's laigs begin to stretch. They stretch like they is rubber, and he begin inchin' out. Then Miss Muskrat give him her hands, rare back on her heels, and he bust loose from that 'lasses and land on the ground.

When Mr. Bullfrog hit the ground he didn't waste no time gatherin' up his fancy clothes, and he didn't waste no time thanking Miss Muskrat for her help. He is burnin' hot all over, and his laigs is all stretched out and smokin' from that hot 'lasses. He take out lickety-split for the pond, and his laigs is so long and sticky he cain't run—he jes hop in big jumps. When he come to the pond he give one big hop, and—kerplunk—in the water he dives.

He musta took a big breaf, 'cause he don't come to the top inside a hour, and I goes home. I don't see him for 'bout a week atter'ards, and then I don't know him, he is so little. Guess he musta jes shrink up, bein' so hot when he jumped in the water. When he see me, he hop, fast as he can, to get back in the water agin. I reckon he so 'shamed he stay in the water most of the time and don't never

One atternoon I's a-standin' on the side of the pond and Mr. Rabbit come down to the water. He see Mr. Bullfrog settin' on a spatterdock, and he begin laffin' at him, like he would bust hisself. "How do Mr. Bullfrog like our 'lasses party?" he say. "Would Mr. Bullfrog care for another bowl of hot 'lasses?"

Mr. Bullfrog swell up his neck, and he turn green around the guzzle, and he let out with: "Jug-er-rum, jug-er-rum." But they ain't nobody ever give him a jug of nothin'.

## The Sharpest Saw

First thing I remember about a circular saw was seeing old man Turner sharpen one. He was hired as a sawyer, and of course it was his job to file the saw. Well, he didn't care much whether it was used on timber, but, boy, how he did love to sharpen it! He wore one plum out in six months, jes filing it.

The day they brought the new saw out to the mill he went through one log and then told the boys to rest, that he was going to file the saw. He cussed the factory for making 'em so dull and then set down and begin to file. I reckon he fooled with it a hour before he was satisfied and started back to work.

There wasn't no "I reckon" to that. He'd keep his saw sharper'n a razor all the time. And I've seen that saw do things I don't believe myself.

One time the loggers was chopping down a big oak standing near the mill. They blocked it to fall the other way, but something went wrong and it fell over on the carriage. The loggers seen what was going to happen and yelled for Turner to run. His answer wasn't nothing but a laugh.

We all just hollered, knowing the saw and the carriage both would get squashed, but that's when we learnt how sharp Turner's saw really was and what a good sawyer he was, too. Right quick he turned the steam on full blast, and when that tree fell acrost the saw, the blade was so sharp it split the tree in two quicker'n your eye could wink. At the same time Turner heaved against the top of the tree, and it cleared the boiler before it hit the ground.

Lots of times the boss had said that Turner wasted time filing, but after he saved so many lives and the mill to

boot, the boss only grinned when Turner took a hour off for more filing.

Turner had a little terrier he loved better'n his wife and kids. Tige stayed around the mill, but he never got into any devilment until the day he got the rabbit up. The rabbit run to'ards the mill with Tige coming full speed after him. The rabbit ducked quick to one side, and Tige run right into the saw. Turner seen it coming and grabbed the dog just after he hit. We knowed Tige was finished when Turner took him down in two pieces. But Turner clapped him together and Tige went on and caught the rabbit. When we looked at him a few minutes later, he hadn't lost a drop of blood, and when we went over him he didn't whimper, so he must not even been sore. The onliest way we could tell it had happened was the hair being gone in a streak around his body and a little ridge. The saw cut him so quick and clean and Turner stuck him back together so quick that the place healed up the second it was cut.

One time the boss had a three-hundred-acre tract to cut over and couldn't find enough loggers to get it cut by the date set in the contrack. Turner could a-sawed it easy if he could a-got the logs to the mill but that didn't seem like it was possible. Turner didn't care. Not being busy, he had more time to file his saw.

They brought in a mountain-high, tunnel-thick hickory tree for him to saw, and somebody said the saw couldn't take it. Turner 'lowed he'd run the saw through that log or run it to hell, one, so he yelled for steam and give it all he had. The governor flew off the engine and she raced to glory. The saw ripped into that log and turned out every piece like it ought to be. But when the saw run out the end of the last slab it twisted off the spindle and took out through the woods. It went plumb out of sight, cutting down trees as it went.

Turner, he just groaned, "I said something about running it to hell, but I didn't really think it could be did."

We took off in all directions like a covey of scared partridges, but everywhere we run the saw flushed us, cutting down more trees. After 'while we found a path where it had cut all the trees up to the road; so we took up the path, hard as we could go. We meant to yell when we passed the loggers, but they wasn't there. The saw had got there first, and they had run off in the direction of the next county. Talk about flying! You ain't seen nothing lessen you watched us.

That was one morning. We went home and stayed indoors the rest of the day, giving the saw time to run down. When we got back next day we thought we was dreaming. That durn saw had not only cut down every foot of timber on that three-hundred-acre tract, but had sawed it up and laid it in piles ready to be hauled. The timber was got cut on time, and the company give Turner a bonus.

# The Whang Doodle

Until I was a growed-up man I'd kite out like a rabbit in the tall grass if anybody so much as mentioned a Whang Doodle in my hearin'. Even now, when a body says anythin' 'bout one of them critters, my skin begins to crinkle up, and seems like I cain't keep my eyeballs from rollin'.

I ain't sayin' I ever met a Whang Doodle face to face, and I don't know as I can tell 'zactly what one looks like, but I come up on one of the varmints oncet and that's enough for me. All I seed was a big flash of gray fur, and a pair of green eyes with lightnin' in 'em, making the awfulest yowl I ever heered—but that's gettin' ahead some, I reckon.

I was jes a shirt-tail boy, this winter I'm tellin' 'bout, and I had toted in a pile of lightwood, and the chimbley jamb was heaped with logs what me and pappy'd cut in the afternoon, and it seem nice and cozy 'round the blazin' hearth, and I's thinkin' to myself, a boy's lucky what's got a good pappy and a good mammy, and a little kid brother, and good rations to eat, and a place to sleep, and a nice fire on a cold night.

Sure seem nice! Pappy was a-settin' afore the fire borin' out corncobs and fixin' hisself some new pipes. Mammy was a-burnin' a hole through the pith of some fig stems with a red-hot darnin' needle for the pipe stems. Smelt powerful good, them burnin' fig stems! Ever oncet in a while mammy'd stoop over and heat the needle in the embers. First the needle'd be black; then when mammy fatches it outen the fire it's red-hot and glowin'.

Pappy look over at mammy, and he grin, and say, "That-air needle look jes like the Whang Doodle's tongue; dog ef it don't."

Mammy, she look up quick and say, "What you tryin' to do—skeer these chillun into fits with you brash talk 'bout that varmint? Better be puttin' you thoughts 'longside with the Good Book and talkin' that kinda talk 'stead such foolishment as you talkin' now." She jerked the needle outen the fire, and when it was cool she lay it on the fireboard. She still a-scowlin' at pappy, but he not worried much 'bout mammy's scoldin'. He jes rare back in his cheer, and he shet his eyes tight, and he sing:

Whang Doodle holler, and Whang Doodle squall,  
Look out chillun, do he git you all.

Mammy she stop what she a-doin', and she say, "I bet iffen you don't shet you mouth like I done tole you, I'se gwine to up and bash you a good'un with this yere long-handle spider."

Pappy sort of settle down atter that. He know not to rile mammy too fur, do she bash him one sure 'nuff, like she say she will. Mammy she say, "Time you chillun git off to bed, anyhow. Moe, you git me them cardin' boards and lemme give yo'all's hair a good combin'. You sure a passel of nappy huids." When mammy gits through with Jim Baby and come my time, seem like she goin' right down to my brains. Then she say, "Yo'all wash you foots, and mind you washes 'em good, and git on off to bed."

Me and Jim Baby sleeps in the shed room where mammy keeps her strings of leather britches and hot peppers. They was hung from the rafters, and the light shinin' in from the hearth makes big shadders on the wall, a-jigglin' and a-jumpin' like spooks and hants. Jim Baby wake up and see them shadders a-traipsin' on the wall, and he grob me and say, "Moe, you reckon that's the ole Whang Doodle a-dancin'?" And I say, "Jim boy, no, them's not the Whang Doodle, them's jes shadders on the wall."

Long atter us chilluns is in bed, I's layin' awake. Seem like I jes cain't git to sleep, thinkin' 'bout that ole Whang

Doodle, what pappy done tole 'bout. I 'members what Pete Bunker say:

The Whang Doodle moaneth  
And the Doodle Bug whineth,

and I feels the goose bumps jes risin'. I slides over clost to Jim Baby, 'cause I's skeered. He holler, in his sleep, "Look out, Moe, how you scrougin' me. I's sleepy and wants you to leave me be."

I lay there, as I say, a long time, thinkin' 'bout that critter whut nobody cain't see. Pappy and mammy is a-snorin' in they bed, and it was so quiet you can hear the mice a-squeakin' and ole Dan a-scratchin' fleas under the house. It was jes one of them black-dark nights, and I keep a-wishin' I can go to sleep so's I can forgit how skeered I is.

All to oncet, out of the quiet, and seem like way off, I hears a long scream: "Ye-e-e-ow-ow-ow."

I jumps right outen the bed, and helt my breafe, and say, "Dear Lawd, look atter me and mine."

Nothin' don't happen for a spell. Ever'thing is still and quiet. Ole Dan quits a-scratchin' his fleas and the mice quit a-runnin' 'round. Then, seem like right down by the hawg lot come that scream agin.

You never heered sech a scatterment in all you born days. I shakes and trembles. I thinks I shorely die. Pappy, he wake up, and go lookin' for his goose gun. Mammy, she wake up and gits the lantern lit.

The hawgs is a-screamin' fitten to kill, and pappy yell to me, "Moe, you git up and hustle. Somethin' is a-gittin' the hawgs."

Iffen I'd a-had my way, I'd snuggle down in the bed and pull the civers over my haid. I know iffen I don't come out pappy come in there and jerk me out, so I pulls on my pants, and foller him, so trembly I cain't hardly stand on my laigs.



Pappy he goes ahead with the gun, and mammy she follers with the lantern, holdin' it up high. I come behind mammy, holdin' to the battlin' board, but I reckon I couldn't hit a flea with it, I's shakin' so bad. Time we gits down the path a piece here comes Jim Baby, cryin' and hollerin', "Wait for me, wait for me—I's skeered." He brung up the rear.

We cropt, single file, 'round the wash house, 'round the spring house, past the branch, and to'rds the hawg pen. The hawgs is a-carryin' on something terrible, screamin' like's if all they throats is being cut.

Jes then the light from mammy's lantern ketched the varmint's eyeballs, and I see them big balls of green fire inside the hawg pen. Pappy raises up the ole gun, and fires, and it sounds like the roar of the heavenly cannon. The old gun kick pappy, and he tumbled back on mammy. Mammy, she drap the lantern and falls down, and seem like my laigs jes fold up and I's a-layin' on the ground, too. Jim Baby, he takes to his heels and lights out fer the house, yellin' and bawlin' hard as he can.

That ole critter skins over the fence of the hawg pen, and I catches a glimpse of him. He looks like he as long as a cow, as high as a goat, and got big ears like a mule. He look like a pinter, but he ain't no pinter. He all gray, and wooly. He take one big jump to'rds the woods, and he lets out his yell: "Ye-e-e-ow-ow-ow."

Pappy gits to his foots and grobs me by the scruff of the neck and he say, "Godamighty boy, run fer the house. Yonder goes the Whang Doodle."

Mammy ran, and pappy ran, and I ran, and we gits in the house, all out of breaif, and Jim Baby he already in there, hidin' in the bed with all the civers pulled up over him. Pappy pulls the door shet and bolts it tight.

Man, I don't never want to see no more Whang Doodle, no suh, ne-ver.

## John Henry of the Cape Fear

I reckon I know more 'bout John Henry than ennybody, 'cept mebbe his pappy and mammy. He was the strongest man what ever lived—white or black. He could drive more steel than any ten men put together. His hands was 'leben inches long, and as big as hams, and his hands jes fit around the handle of a twenty-pound hammer like they was made for it.

I know 'zactly where John Henry was born. He was born in a log house on the bank of the Cape Fear, jes a few mile above Fayetteville. I know that 'cause I was there when he was born, and I knowed his pappy and his mammy sence I was a teensy boy.

John Henry weighed thirty pound when he was born, and that's no lie. He weighed three hunner and twelve pound when he died, and he was thirty-two year old when he died. They ain't no steam hammer what beat John Henry. Them's all lies 'bout the steam hammer beatin' him. The Angel of Death done beat John Henry, and his Master, who he allus served good, done called him home.

Before John Henry was born, ever'body knowed what was goin' a-happen, and knowed this goin' a-be the biggest baby in the world. Then when Miz Henry gave the word to her man, and he set out on his mule for the granny woman, ever'body knowed her time done come. The house was most filled with darkies, and agin the granny woman got there they's folks on the porch and in the yard, a-waitin'. Aunt Rilla Mitchell, she the granny woman what ole man Henry fotched.

It was 'bout the last of May and mighty hot. John Henry was born in the fireplace room 'bout two hours attar dinner. Jes afore he was born, they come a black cloud outen

the sout'west. A pack of us stood on the porch and watched the cloud gather. The cloud stretch north and south as fur as you can see. When the cloud come up, the birds begin singin' ever'where, jes like they do 'bout sundown at matin' time, and a cool breeze sprung up.

When John Henry was born, two men help the granny woman lift him and carry him to the tub for the wash. Then they lift that baby, what looked like a half-growed boy, and laid him on the bed, 'longside his mammy. When they laid him on the bed a big clap of lightnin' flashed clean across the sky, and the thunder, jes like a hammer, big as a barn, done hit the earth close to the cabin. It jolted the cabin, and rattled all the pans, like it knock ever'thing loose.

'Bout this time it turn mighty dark, and the rain began fallin'. The wind came faster and faster. The lightnin' kept flashin', and the thunder kept clappin'. This was the worse storm I ever seen. The tops of the trees bent over and teched the ground; the leaves and limbs blowed off, and some fall on the roof and the porch of the cabin. The womenfolks began to pray and ask the Lawd to save 'em.

The storm kept gettin' wurser and wurser. Then Uncle George jumped up from his knees, where he'd been prayin', and he shouted out: "Praise God, a great youngun's been borned, a nigger youngun what'll live for God and help all the darkies on this earth. He'll do great things for his God and his race."

Miz Henry, she say out loud, "Lawd, look atter my chile. Guide him, and Lawd, let my chile larn and allus 'member John, three and sixteen. Amen." Then Uncle Henry started singin' "Put You Trust in Jesus, and You Needn't Fear No Harm," and ever'body joined in the singin', and in jes a short time the wind died down, and the lightnin' stopped and the rain stopped too. The birds started singin' agin, and in jes a lil bit the sun was shinin' bright as ever.

When the sun came out, Uncle George say, "No use bein' 'fraid no more, so let's weigh the youngun."

Uncle George went and fotched the steel beam, and threw a rope over the rafter, and hooked the steel beam in the rope. The big tater basket was fotched, too, and put on the lower hook.

"No use weighin' that basket," say John Henry's pappy, "'cause I knows it weighs jes five pounds."

Uncle George say, "Ennyways, I's goin' to weigh this basket to make sure," and he weighs the basket and it weighs five pound, jes like ole man Henry done said.

They lifted the baby in the basket, and Uncle George set the pea at fifteen pound, and the beam jerked up. He moved the pea over to twenty pound, and the beam jerked up. He moved the pea over to thirty pound, and the beam jerked up. When he put the pea at thirty-five pound, the beam leveled off.

When John Henry was two weeks old he weighed forty-one pound. His pappy was six feet two, and his mammy five feet nine, and it look like John Henry gwine be as big as both of 'em in no time atall. He growed so fast when he was a year old he weighed ninety pound, and he larn fast, and seem like he talk like a grownup when he 'bout four year old.

He was real quiet—never have much to say—from the time he was born. Some folks brung him toys, but he wouldn't have no truck with 'em. One day his pappy was driving a nail in the wall to hang a pitcher, and dropped the hammer on the floor. It made a noise when it fell. John Henry begun to laugh, and he picked up the hammer, and begun to play with it. He say, "Please, pappy, give it to me." And his pappy give it to him, and John Henry carried the hammer to bed with him and sleep with it in the bed.

After that seem like John Henry allus have his hammer, and he begun to use it, hammerin' on logs, and sech, and

then he got to crackin' rocks with it. He jes growed and growed, and one day he hit a rock so hard he broke the hammer, and his pappy got him a bigger one with a five-pound head and a thick hick'ry haft. When he was fourteen year old, he was as big as any man in the country and he begun workin' in the rock quarry, gettin' out rock for chimbleys and buildin's. He went to school and learned to read and write, and went to Sunday School. He jined the church when he was fifteen year old, and he lived a good Christian life.

When he started workin' in the quarry, he had a special hammer made for him. It weighed twenty pound, and they ain't no other man in the country what can bring it up over his haid and swing it easy. They paid John Henry a dollar a day, jes same as they did the older men, and John Henry gave all his money to his pappy.

Folks began comin' from all around to see John Henry work in the quarry and swing the big hammer. Nobody believed any boy could swing a twenty-pound hammer and break up rock the way he a-doin'. It looked so easy, the way he swang, and seem like he know just where to hit, 'cause the rock allus split jes right for him. After he worked in the quarry a year, he broke up more rock in a day than any four men put together, and the boss raised his pay to two dollars a day.

Seem like John Henry jes growed 'tached to his hammer. He carried it ever'where he go. He carried it to church, but left it outside the door till he come out. He was nice and quiet, and kind to ever'body. He never used his strength to fight. He never had a fight in his hull life. Course he never had to, 'cause nobody ever offered to fight him, but I reckon if they did he woulda jes laugh and go on his business.

He got so he'd lay a stone on the ground and practice drivin' it with his hammer. He could kill a deer, jes drivin'

a rock, and he could even kill partridges and rabbits that a-way. He never killed much game, jes enough for the pot at home. I's seen him hit the bank of the river with his hammer, and the fish would all jump up outten the water. I's seen him hit a tree with his hammer and shake the squirrels loose.

When he was nineteen he weighed two hunner and eighty pounds, all man, and not a ounce of fat on his body. Then a white man come to where he lived and asked him, does he want to work for the railroad. They's cuttin' tunnels through the mountings, and they needs good steel drivers. They offered John Henry three dollars a day and his rations will he go. While the man was there, John Henry took up a rock, twice as big as a man's haid, and he threw it in the air, and when it come down he hit it with his hammer and busted it into a million pieces. The man shook his haid like he didn't believe what he done seen.

John Henry talked it over with his mammy and his pappy, and they all prayed to the Lawd for guidance, and his mammy and pappy say the Lawd done called him to go into the world and do his part. May fifteen was the day set for him to go. The word went 'round and darkies come from long ways off to say goodbye to John Henry. Ever'body wanted to talk to him and give him advice, and tell him how to get along with white folks. When it got time to start to town, the hull crowd marched along with him. Looked like a army of cullud folks on the march. They kept step together and they sung as they marched, and John Henry, with his big hammer on his shoulder, marched at the haid of the hull crowd. Afore they got to the town where John Henry goin' to get on the railroad train, a rainstorm come up, but they kept marchin' right on in the rain. John Henry's pappy say, "Son, you was born on a day like this. Look at that cloud. It's a-movin' north, and

it's a-leadin' you. Be a good man, John Henry, and we's all proud of you, most-wise you pappy and mammy."

John Henry went north to work for the railroads. We didn't hear nothin' from him for over a year, when a man what worked with him on the Big Ben Tunnel came back and told us 'bout John Henry. He say John Henry the greatest steel driver what ever been. He drive steel fourteen feet, while ten other men drive it the same. His fame done spread all over the country, and they take him ever'-place to show how much steel he can drive and how he handle that big hammer. He was give up to be the strongest man what ever lived—stronger even than Samson, or Goliath, or ennybody. And they say that John Henry is most polite, and he goes to church regular, and he say his prayers ever night, jes like he do when he home.

Then we didn't hear nothin' for 'bout two year, when 'the parson gets a letter from a man way out West, say that John Henry is a big hero. He say in his letter that John Henry and a big gang of other men is workin' in a tunnel, driving steel, when the hull top of the tunnel begun to bust loose, 'cause a e-normous rock is cavin' in. Ever'-body yell, and try to run, but fall over 'emselfs. John Henry jes lay down his hammer, and he put up his two hands and he hold the rock in place while the men get out. He keeps holdin' the rock and called to 'em to bring joists to hold it, and he holds that rock up above his haid until they git joists under it. The company offer to give John Henry a day off for that, but he say he didn't want no day off, and so the company writes him a fine letter, sayin' that he saved the lives of all them men and that he's a hero.

Things like that we hear, ever year or two. Once we heared that John Henry held up the cable of a elevator what a dozen men was riding on, when the cable begun to break. That makes him more of a hero, but John Henry is jes as quiet and nice to folks like he allus been.

'Bout this time they was a protracted meetin' goin' on in the Flat Branch Church. One night, John Henry's pappy and mammy ax the parson to pray that their son come home. The preacher prayed hard, and the congregation joined in. The next night they pray agin. Next Sunday mornin', whilst ever'body is in church, John Henry walked in with his hammer in his hand.

The meetin' done busted up, whilst ever'body crowded 'round and shake John Henry's hand, and ax him a million questions. Seem like ever'body for miles 'round come to his pappy's house that afternoon. When he sees me he tells me he wants to talk to me private, and in the evenin' we gets away from the crowd and walks in the woods. John Henry tells me he is now six feet, seven inches high, and he weighs three hunner and twenty pound, and he has been that high and weigh that much for two year, so he reckon he won't git no bigger. He say they need good men on the railroads, and does I want to go back with him. I tells him I'll talk it over with my wife and let him know in a hour. My wife makes a awful fuss 'bout my goin', and say I'll do like John Henry, hardly ever come home, but I promised to come home oncet a year, and I tells John Henry I's goin' with him.

John Henry fixes to leave next day, and jes like when he leave fust time, ever'body marches to town with him. Only they's not so happy 'bout his goin' this time. Seem like they think he's never comin' back no more and they won't never see him agin. Before he leave, his mammy give him a Bible, and on the blank page she write, "My son, never forgit John three and sixteen."

When we got to the depot John Henry tells me that we's goin' to work for the Santa Fe, out West, and they is more steel to drive than anybody ever see. It took us four days ridin' to get to them mountings, and they was powerful big gangs workin'—white men and cullud men, Indians,



and furriners. When we got there, they is a lot of talk 'bout a new steam hammer what has been tried out, and now they's goin' to work it for the railroad. They say the steam hammer can do the work of twenty men, and that it don't ever tire down, and can work all the time without sleepin' like a man does.

John Henry has lots of friends in the gang, and they come to him and say he can drive more steel than any steam biler. In a few days a gang of white men come along with the steam hammer, and they is puttin' the contrapshun together, when some of John Henry's friends go and say, "John Henry can drive more steel than you ole steam kittle can." The white men laugh at 'em, but they is a lot of talk whether the steam hammer can beat John Henry.

John Henry go on 'bout his business, drivin' steel like ten men, and they is payin' him four dollars a day, him a-workin' ten hours. One night a man comes over from the steam-hammer gang and he say, "They's been a lot of talk goin' 'round 'bout what a good steel driver this John Henry is. I hear some braggin' 'bout this John Henry can beat the steam hammer. Well, mebbe he's pretty good, and mebbe he's not, I ain't never seen him drive steel. But I's willin' to lay five hunner dollars the steam drill can beat him."

I told him I'd let him know, and I called the boys together and laid out the propersition. One thing we knowed, them steam-hammer fellers ain't never seen John Henry drive, and they don't know what he can do. Then agin, we ain't never seen no steam hammer drive, but we's sure John Henry can beat any man or machine on God's earth.

We get up the five hunner dollars in our gang, and the steam-hammer fellers puts up five hunner, but we keep the hull business 'bout the bettin' from John Henry, 'cause we know he won't do airy thing if he knows they's bets laid, 'cause he thinks bettin's wicked.

The superintendent was a good friend of John Henry, and he come over and talks to John Henry 'bout it. He tells John Henry he ain't never seen the steam hammer drill rock, but the company has tested it out and it's fast and powerful, and he say he don't advise John Henry to race agin the machine. Seems like John Henry jes rise up and ax, "How come you don't want me to race that steam hammer? Is you 'fraid I'll beat it? They ain't no steam hammer can beat these here arms."

It wasn't jes 'zactly braggin' what John Henry was a-doin'. He was jes talkin' like he meant it. He told the superintendent to go ahead and fix for the race and he'd be ready anytime.

So they fixed up for the race at the quarry. At the mouf of the quarry was the shops where the blacksmiths sharpen the steels and repair the hammers. 'Bout half mile from the quarry was the shanties where the men lived, and some of 'em had they famblies with 'em. The shacks was in charge of a feller they calls the shack-rouster. He keeps good order and wakes up the hands in the mornin'. He's a good friend of John Henry, and he talk to John Henry ever day, tellin' him how things is goin', and givin' him 'couragement. John Henry lissen, but he jes keep quiet.

The night afore the race, folks come in from all directions. All the gangs is give a holiday, and even country folks drive in for miles 'round to see the fun. They was a long line of wagons and carts in the roads afore daybreak, and at seven o'clock the space all 'round the quarry is crowded, and folks is perched on the mountain trying to get a look.

The steam hammer's done been set up the day afore and we had our fust look at it. The drill contrapshun was a lil steel cylinder what two men can hold easy, but the biler what make the steam is 'bout twenty feet long and

eight feet through. It took a eight-mule team to sled it in place. They was a whissel on the biler, and a clock on the front, and a long rubber hose what run from the biler to the hammer. That ole hammer look so teensy, folks laugh at it, all 'cept the biler gang what done come with it.

The race is to start at eight o'clock. John Henry is to drive a hole thirty feet deep in the solid granite rock, and the steam hammer is to drill a hole thirty feet deep, and whichever drive the hole fust win the race.

I talked with John Henry the night afore the race, and he seem worryin' 'bout it. I tells him not to worry, he will win sure, and I promise I'll see that his steel is kept sharp all the time and if his hammer breaks I'll git him 'nuther. He jes don't seem to be listenin' to me atall, jes look faraway-like.

When we gets down to the quarry, 'bout hap-past seben, the fellers at the biler has got up steam, and is tooting the whissel to try it out. They has got two white men to hold the hammer and a darkey to fire the biler. Yes, sir, they is three men working that machine 'gainst jes one John Henry, and each side has a man to hold steel and keep twistin' it while the hammers fly.

Ever'body is good to John Henry, like I say, 'cause they respects him and knows he is quiet and honest. Ever'body is hopin' John Henry'd win—that is ever'body but that gang with the steam hammer. Even the superintendent wanted John Henry to win, I can tell the way he acted.

They get a new hammer for John Henry, and a fresh sharpened steel, and the blacksmiths is workin' like beavers, sharpenin' more steels. Carriers is ready with pads on they shoulders to carry the sharpened steel and carry the dull 'uns back to the shop. The steels is jes alike, and they carries 'em to the steam hammer the same way.

It was agreed that the shack-rouster will start the race by droppin' his hat. John Henry stand there, nekked to

the waist, lookin' like a wunnerful black giant, his mussels bulgin', and his skin shinin' like satin. I is close behind him, gettin' ready with the steels, and his steel holder come up and hold the sharp steel agin the rock where John Henry is to drive.

At five minutes to eight, the shack-rouster yell out, "Five minnets," and ever minnet pass he yell out, "Four minnets—three minnets, two minnets." When he yell "One minnet," John Henry lift up his twenty-pound hammer, and start swingin' it easy like, and he lift it over his haid, so when the shack-rouster drop the hat, John Henry hit his fust lick.

John Henry hit a powerful lick, square on the head of the steel, and he so sure of his drivin' a steel holder can lay his haid right 'longside the steel and never be scairt John Henry slip his hammer jes a lil bit.

When the hat drop, that steam hammer start up, and I never heerd sech a racket what that steam hammer make. It go "rat-tat-tat-tat-tat," jes like a million woodpeckers all hittin' at the same time.

John Henry seem not to be in a hurry. He jes get to swingin' that hammer like he do ever day—swing back, overhead, and down. When his hammer hit the steel, John Henry let out a lil grunt—"ugh"—like that. When John Henry drive ten minutes he stop and I puts in a sharp steel. I look over and I see that John Henry's steel is 'bout a inch deeper'n the steam-hammer drill. John Henry start in agin, swingin' easylike, but jes as regular as a clock. The steam hammer never let up, 'cept to change steel. That ole steam kept a-hissin' and the hammer sing out "rat-tat-tat-tat," so's you could hear it a mile away.

Ever time we changed steel I looked over to the steam hammer, and I sees John Henry is gainin' all the time. It was 'greed that the race stop at twelve o'clock for ten minnets for the men to eat lunch and rest. When come

twelve o'clock John Henry is 'bout nine inches deeper'n the steam hammer, and ever'body joins in and we give John Henry three rousin' cheers. We had coffee and beef stew, and biscuits for John Henry, 'cause he say that's what he wants. He was sweatin' pretty good, but not more than he would be workin' regular.

When the end of the rest come, the shanty-rouster drops his hat, and the race starts agin. I is so used to John Henry's drivin' I could tell the minnet he changed speed, but he didn't change speed, and I is countin' with his licks, seventy-nine, eighty, eighty-one. 'Course I was countin' to myself.

Folks back in the crowd and up on the mountain keep callin' in, "How does she stand?" and the superintendent would yell back, "John Henry leadin' by eleben inches"—or whatever it was. 'Bout two o'clock the steam drill bit into a soft pocket and picked up seven inches easy, and cut John Henry's lead way down, but half hour later John Henry's drill went through a pocket and he got 'bout five inches of his lead back.

At six o'clock the superintendent yells out, "John Henry's ahead fourteen inches." John Henry sat down 'longside his hammer, and he drunk six cups of coffee, straight down, and he don't eat but five biscuits and say that's all he want.

I notice now they is makin' some changes. They is bringin' up a new gang of steel carriers, and puttin' on a new blacksmith. The others look so tired they 'bout ready to drop in they tracks. The steam-hammer gang is puttin' two new men on the hammer, and I see that two new men has come up to fire the biler in place of one what was there afore.

This don't look fair to me, that they can change hammer men and change biler men, and I speaks up to the superintendent, but he say they is no 'greement that the steam-hammer men couldn't change, 'cause it is a race between

John Henry and the machine and not a race between John Henry and the steam-hammer gang.

When they start up agin, John Henry is swingin' as strong as when he started and his licks is jes as regular. Now I ain't never afore seen any man swing a hammer, straight all day, with jes short stops. A man'd drive for a spell and then they'd put in dynamite and blast out rock. Then he'd drive some more, but I reckon no man would drive more'n half time with plenty of long stops in between. And I wonder jes how long John Henry can keep this up. And a funny feelin' comes over me.

The steam-hammer gang changed they crews agin at midnight, and new men was put on carryin' steel and hold-in' steel, but seem like nobody wants to go home, jes stay there and watch the race out. John Henry is still fourteen inches ahead.

I reckon it was 'bout five o'clock in the mornin' I think I see a change comin' over John Henry. He ain't changed his speed ner let up in his power all night, but 'bout five o'clock I could tell he wasn't as steady as he was. The count jes wasn't so regular. First it would be a lil bit faster, then a lil bit slower. And I could see his licks wasn't all the same, like they'd a-been. Some was stronger and some was a lil weaker. He was sweatin' harder. That's the way it went till six o'clock, when they was 'nother rest.

Atter his rest look like John Henry jes as fresh as ever, but in 'bout a hour, he begin to get onsteady agin. The steam-hammer men holler for more steam, and them biler men start throwing in pine wood, and pretty soon they has the steam blowin' off from that biler, and the steam hammer is hittin' harder and makin' a louder noise than it did.

The sweat is drippin' fast from John Henry's body. It run off him from the top of his haid, down to his waist, and his pants is so wet like they been put in a tub of water. John Henry calls for water, and I hands him a dipperful

'bout ever ten-fifteen minutes. I talk to him and tell him to take it easy, he's doin' fine.

'Bout eight o'clock John Henry has two feet of steel to go and the steam hammer has gained so they is 'bout eight inches behind. At nine o'clock they stop agin, and the steam hammer has gained two more inches. John Henry wouldn't eat nothin', jes drink coffee—'bout as much coffee as I could pour to him. He look at me funny, but he don't say a word, jes set 'longside his hammer, and look over at the steam hammer.

When the shanty-rouster drop the hat agin, I is scairt, and I worry should I call the superintendent and git him to stop the race. John Henry is swingin' agin, but in jes a few minutes he is slowin' down. I jes ain't got the heart to ax John Henry to give up. I gets to countin' his licks agin and afore I knowed it, John Henry done missed the steel and hit the rock aside the steel. The steel holder drop the steel, quick, 'cause iffen John Henry miss on t'other side he crush the holder's hand.

John Henry never raised his hammer no more. He lifted his hand to his haid, and run it 'cross his eyes. Then his knees begin to shake, and they double up, and John Henry jes crumple down. Somebody yells out, and folks come a-runnin', and the superintendent come a-runnin'. I put my arm behind John Henry's shoulders, and hold him up, and I call for a dipper of water, and try to git him to drink it. His eyes is lookin' dull-like, and he won't drink no water, but he is a mumblin' somethin'. I lean over to his face, and I hear him sayin', ". . . that whosoever . . . believeth in Him . . . should not perish. . . ."

That is the last he say, and he jes give a few gasps, and John Henry is daid.

Ever'body is terrible sorry. The steam-hammer gang is terrible sorry, and they say John Henry is the greatest steel driver what ever was. John Henry still have 'bout twelve

inches to drive his steel home, and the steam hammer 'bout two inches behind him. The steam-hammer gang never did drive that steel home—they say they jes cain't do it, and the superintendent he say the steam hammer never beat John Henry.

We buried John Henry behind the quarry in good ground and we put up a big square piece of granite on his grave. The men come and chisel words on that stone, and it say: "John Henry, John 3-16."



## A Night at Pickey's

I never knowed the difference between a hant and a ghost until I spent that night at Pickey Bailey's. A hant is female and a ghost is male. 'Twarn't so long ago I made the 'quaintance of these varmints and I'm still 'most too wore out to tell about it. 'Course I wasn't never really scared. My nerves was just frazzled some 'round the edges, that's all.

Crazy Pickey is a hermit. Folks give him this name 'cause he used to be a great one to sit alone and pick the banjo in his young days. His wife and son is dead, and he has toughed it out alone till his mind has got as twisted as his poor old frame.

One evening I'm trudging home through the mist, toting a bag of corn. I pass Pickey a-setting on his porch. His house is spookified enough without nothing happening in it, even. He's a quare-enough soul, sure as Chatham's a good county. He don't usually say howdy to a feller or put hisself out in no which way, so when he calls out it gives me quite a start.

He's a-rocking, bent over with a misery in his arm. I ain't seen him in some time, and I ain't never seen him close.

"Come in here and set," he says.

I hesitates and counts my thoughts.

And I 'members how I've heard the boys in town telling 'bout Pickey's fearsome hants and his way of talking, but I never really taxed myself none with this gossip. "Ain't it just too bad, you grownup babies a-lipping such lies," I'd say, and go on.

Jes the same I would a-went on home, but I is tuckered

out. The corn is pow'ful heavy, and the long wet walk to the mill and back has me pure peaked.

"Don't care if I do come in a while," I says, opening the busted gate. Two hounds come at me. They is poor and has yellow teeth behind their drawed-up lips.

The old man gits to his feet and yells, "I'll git shet of you yet. Git under the house and quit hollering!"

Pickey's eyes is red-rimmed and weak. He's about seventy now, I reckon, and he used to be a mighty drinking man. A ragged hat on his head has cobwebs a-swinging from it. His nose is crooked as a chicken hawk's.

Soon as them hounds quiets, I sets down on the step. It sure feels good to rest my feet. It is plumb peculiar for Bailey to want to see a body so I reckon pure curiosity keeps me there.

Rain set in bad and sudden, and I gets up on the porch. Water is pouring down through the leaky roof. It is getting whole lots darker. The cornstalks across the road shows up dim agin the wet sky; ain't a light to be seen nowheres nor a soul a-moving in the road or fields. Nearest neighbor is six mile off.

Sommers in the house a door is banging back and forth. Shore's funny, 'cause I don't feel no wind a-stirring and the rain is coming straight down.

"There ain't no rations cooked here tonight, if that's why you come." Pickey leans over the side of the porch and blows his nose.

"I'm a-going on in a minute," I says. "I didn't expect no vittals. And asides, you axed me in."

"Them robins, them robins," he says next, a-wagging his head and a-running his hand in his beard, easylike.

"What's that?" I ax him. Nobody ain't been speaking 'bout robins atall. Leastwise, I ain't.

"'Twere winter when them birds come in swarms. Ice and snow covered the ground. They was thick in the pine

grove yonder." Pickey motions vague in the distance. "I ambled over and gathered froze ones from under the trees. Some was a-singing and some was a-dying, jes like folks is doing this blessed minute. I come on home here with a good armful of red-breasts aimed for a deep pie. I was hungrified and I picked and stewed them robins for a hour. Made me a good crust covering for a potpie." Pickey stopped talking and sucked through his snaggy teeth. Then he went on:

"When I set down to relish them things my gums was sure itching to begin. The crust looked brown and smelled as good as a Baptis' picnic. When I put the spoon in, I couldn't hardly wait. But now listen to what I'm a-saying. Under the pastry that there pot were pure empty. Not a piece of meat or bone. Oddified somewhat, weren't it?"

Old Pickey stops a-jawing and rubs his crippled shoulders. "They had just flewed on out, I reckon, and gone back to singing."

I had a awful lonesome feeling 'round my knees when he tells about them birds being missing from the bottom of that there potpie. And the hounds had set up a howl under the floor. The sound don't soothe a man any way atall.

"Shet yore mouth, Bertha. Emily, do like'ise!" Bailey chuckles to hisself. Ain't exactly chuckle nuther, some way.

"Feller better git on his way," I 'lows along about this time aspote the rain. I has done beaned the sack on my back when Pickey stops me with a move of his hand. "See that flash, then? That was lightning a-striking my barn agin!"

"I didn't see no flash," I says. And then I seen he was a-smiling to hisself and a-rocking faster than ever.

"Don't never hurt it none," he says. "I've got the biggest barn in the country. Got lightning rods, too. Barn

gets struck about oncet a week and burns down to the ground. But when I goes milking of a morning it's done built up agin, so I don't worry none about it."

"Well, I declare," I says, wondering whether maybe I has seen lightning or maybe I hasn't.

"Got a cow down there named Rebecca," Pickey says. "She ain't been fresh for nine years. Becky don't care, and I don't nuther if she don't."

I am half on the porch and half on the step—a-going, I mean—when a old blind goose comes a-bobbling out of the rain. She comes up and sets on Bailey's chair and picks at his sleeve. "She's eating corn," he says.

"This here's Rosemary. She's twenty-five or thirty year old. I killed her oncet, but it didn't do no good," the old man says. "Rosemary don't do nothing now but pick grass and squawk and eat corn offen my coat sleeve."

"Well, I do declare," I says, uneasylike.

Sudden I see a strange percession a-filing through the side yard. They is chickens, turkeys, and ducks a-making out the gate. Perty soon Rosemary gets up and joins them.

When I looks at them fowls a-leaving, I says, "Well, I be doggone."

Old Pickey shoves his hat offen his forehead. "Don't take 'ception or git to studying about it," he says. "They always leaves home when strangers come. They ain't nothing pusnal in it."

Two sheep come round the corner of the house next. "Looks like they ain't never been sheared," I says.

"They ain't," Bailey answers. "They asked me not to."

Seems to me like this is a mighty quare conversation for two bodies to be having. I ain't taking no pleasure in it no way atall. I'm awful chilly and terrible hungry too. Dark has settled down for sure now. Man couldn't see his hand afore his face in the path yonder.

Sudden the old fellow surprises me by saying, "You'd

best pass the night here." Rising from his chair, he leads the way into the house.

Gosh a'mighty! A funny feeling comes over me right away, just soon's I puts mortal foot over that there thres'old.

Pickey finds a piece of candle stub and lights it in the damp hall. He stumbles some as he leads the way out to the kitchen.

"I'm sorry my wife has took to her grave," he says. "Otherwise us would have a good supper. She were the cookin'est woman you ever seen."

"That's all right," I says, squinting around me in the dimness.

It's the dirtiest place I ever seen in my whole life. Greasy pots piled most to the ceiling, and tin knives and forks has done rusted near-bout away.

"Have a drink of Adam's ale?" old Bailey says, holding out a dipper of water to me.

"Don't care if I do," I says.

We set there a few minutes listening to the rain outside. I eat some dried apples and some last fall's hickory nuts. I feel a little better, but not much.

"Want to see the parlor?" Pickey asks. I followed him acrost the hall. The candle makes all sorts of oddified shapes on the wall.

"'Twere just here my son Leslie's casket set," he says, a-pointing to a corner.

There's a big fireplace, and great logs is a-blazing away in it. Don't seem to cast no heat, though.

"Don't never have to kindle that fire," the old man says. "Jes builds itself every twilight and goes out before day. Nice, ain't it?"

"I reckon so," I says, thinking that maybe I should have went on home.

There's a lot of heavy dingy furniture setting about, and some framed pictures is on a chest. Seems like I can jes

make out four marks on the flowered carpet where that coffin had stood. I ain't taking to all this one bit.

"Time to go to roost," Bailey says, and we starts up to the second story. Them steps creaks under our feet in a most discomfortable fashion, seems to me.

There is four doors upstairs, all of 'em closed; but the one we goes in the hinges is broke and the latch is a-hanging loose.

Sort of quick-like I figures that this here room is jes square over the parlor where them coffin rings shows.

I notices a door over near the window. The knob is gone. Looks like a closet that's been sealed fast for a long spell.

Pickey lights a lamp for me and puts it on the table.

"Hope you rest easy," he says abrupt-like, starting to leave. Presently he comes back with a gallon jug of raw corn liquor. "You may need it," he says, grinning mysterious. "Good-night, and I gets up at five," he adds, setting the jug on a chair by the bed.

"Good-night," I replies. "And I thanks you."

Well, I is sure tired most terrible bad and I don't lose no time a-stretching out under the quilt. Ain't a sign of no stove or nothing, and I realize that I'm about to freeze.

"Well, here goes," I says, a-stretching out one hand to turn the wick. Ain't no need to have moved because when that lamp sees me a-stretching over toward it, it just weaks on down and goes out slow without my touching it.

Gives me a sort of shiver like, but I'm so danged wore out that I don't pay it no mind.

I must a-been a-dreaming, I reckon, 'cause I wakes up sudden with a jerk. Something is a-sliding offen me. I finds that my covers is a-creeping down towards the foot of the bed. I don't have no time to consider this, though. About now the lamp lights itself low-like and I catch sight of a varmint a-coming under the winder sill.

This here critter has the form of a cat. I sits up and considers its aspect. Its hair is shaggy and grey, its claws full three inches long, and its eyes burns like red embers.

"Howdy," it says in a husky voice. "I'd sure like a dram from that jug."

"Is you a ghost or hant?" I asks, uncertainlike.

"Ghost. I is male," it answers, its eyes on the liquor. "Hants is female."

"I ain't got no saucer to give you a potion," I says, a-catching at the covers which keeps on a-creeping.

"Oh, that's all right," the critter says, a-clawing the rug impatient-like. "Jes pour some on the carpet."

"Who is you?" I asks, picking up the whiskey.

"None of your business," this here ghost answers, a-lapping the stuff up from the floor. I sees he wants more.

"Will you make these blamed quilts stay put if I gives you another?" I asks.

"Yeah," he answers, a-grabbing the jug and drinking deep.

This here varmint sure relishes his booze, I thinks to myself.

The critter washes his whiskers, then his tail, and sits looking up at me. Come over me, it wants I should pet it.

"Nice kitty," I says, reaching my hand down to stroke its ears.

"Leave go of me," it yelps, pulling away, and with a nimble hop it jumps over the sill into the dark.

The rain has stopped now and the room is awful quiet, but I don't find it restful atall. I lays thinking for a spell, a-trying to figure out if it ain't strange for a cat to take on human ways. I is so addly by now that I jes can't tell. Seems like I can't recall none of our family pets taking a swig and a-liking it.

"Go on out," I says to the lamp, and it does.

At least them covers has quieted down some. I notices







them a-stretching out oncet more. My knees is a-knocking together, and my teeth is doing likewise. Don't know what's causing it, but it sure makes a fellow unsure of his own self. Seems like the longest night ever was spent by a man or beast. Ain't no clock to go by, nuther.

Soon's I comes to myself a little I settles down on the pillow and am just drifting off when there comes a tapping and a beating from inside the closet yonder. Then a weazened voice whispers, "Git in here and make me up a fruit pudding. I'll tell you how. You pour it in a sack and boil it."

Setting on the side of the bed, I asks, "Is you a ghost or hant?"

"I'm a lady hant," she says, calm and nice as you please.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance," I says.

"Likewise I is yours," she says.

Some spirits is whole lots more reasonable than others I suspects, so I says, "I'm awful tired and sleepy right now."

"Let's dance 'steal partners'," she says, a-shaking her bones in music time.

"I don't know how," I says, thinking I'd want a more solid'fied partner if I was to try.

"Go get me a witch doctor," she says, "to help find the key to this here door."

"Well, I'll look for one," I says, seeing I've got to talk to her to ease her.

"My limbs is cold," she says. "I can't find my shawl."

"Hold on, I'll look for it," I answers, noticing that the lamp has come on.

Ain't no sound for a spell. Then she calls out, "Please get me a taste of plum wine to warm up my vitals some."

"Quit pestering me!" I yells, losing my temper. "You quit it!" I says.

I don't hear nothing for a while; then she says, "I hopes you sleeps well."

"Sleeps well!" I says sarcastic-like. "Will you show me a man, white or black, on top side of this earth, who could sleep well in this hant-ridden, nerve-tormenting spot? Cat ghosts a-slipping under the sill, covers creeping away, lamps going on and off, and a whiney, pesky woman in the closet!"

I waits for a reply, but she has went, I reckon. Anyways I has heard the last word from her.

I gives up my thought of rest and goes and sets by the winder. The lady hant were polite enough, I reasons to myself, and I'm sort of sorry I lost my temper with her. Added up, I has done met two varmint personal, and they is jest as diff'rent as folks is. The ghost's manners was right common and ill, and the hant were right clever, come to think of it.

Looking out, I see that day is at hand. Sky is rosy with God's bursting sun.

I comes out of the room and tiptoes downstairs. As I passes through the parlor, I gives the fireplace a glance. Ain't no sign of last night's coals, not a ash to be seen. Sure is quare. Not a soul has stirred in the house yet nor done no cleaning. Old Pickey is snoring in the back.

Jes as I is hurrying out of the front gate, Pickey sticks his head 'round the porch.

"How did you rest?" he asks.

"Tolerable," I answers, fumbling with the latch.

"Iffen you'll stay, I'll play you a jig on the banjo," the old man says.

"Much oblige, but I'll be getting on home," I calls, running down the road as fast as my legs will carry me. "I has sure enjoyed my stay," I yells over my shoulder, remembering my manners. I wasn't born in Chatham County for nothing.

## Jenny - Mule

How come I to get her, a man in town owed me some money. He couldn't never seem to pay, so one day I says, "Look here, how about a little cash on the spot?"

"Ain't got any cash on the spot or nowhere else," he says, "but I've got the finest baby mule ever been in Chatham County. Come on over to my farm and look at her."

Well, I went with him and seemed like the very minute I set eyes on her I just had to have her.

"Leave the rest of the debt go," I says, "I'll just take this critter and we'll call it quits."

She wasn't no higher than my knee. Was black and sleek and had a pearl-colored belly. Spunk and grit was writ in her countenance even when she was a little feller.

I put a rope 'round her neck and led her on home and tied her to a tree. How come I tied her was because she wanted awful bad to tag me every step I took. I went about milking and feeding and I was trying to figure out a name for her. I come back and set on a stump under the grapevine and I studied her face careful. Finally it come to me that she favored my cousin Molly Pitcher Smith down in Siler, so I called her Molly Pitcher from that time on.

I give the little thing her supper, which she et proper-like. She cried like a baby when I started to leave and go to the house. "Aw, honey, shet your mouth," I says, a-patting her head. Her ears was nice and soft too. I was just crazy about that there jenny-mule of mine.

Some folks likes cats and takes them in. Others keeps hound dogs and sech. When Chatham folks got on the subject, I always stood up for Molly.

"But you can't pick up no fool mule in your lap and stroke it," somebody says.

"I can if I take a notion to," I says, and I walked home and done it. Went right out in the clover field and picked Molly up. Don't care how foolish it sounds, it's my own business and hern.

When a feller lives by hisself, another lonely critter on the place makes a whole heap of difference. It sure was lonesome as a graveyard coming home of a evening and no chick nor child to say, "Howdy," "Go to hell," or nothing. So when Molly come, seem like I was a lot more joyous in every way.

She growed fast as mischief. I measured her by a rail in the fence and I gave her a birthday present every month—a basket of pears, and sech like. When she see me coming out of the house she was tickled as a possum at a tree full of ripe 'simmons. She was just as glad to see me whether I had pears or no.

To begin with, don't no self-respecting mule say, "Hee haw!" Ain't no such comical sound atall. I can't mock it, but it ain't that. Mules has got their own dignity to keep up and they does it. Any critter what the Democrats would choose for their mascot is just bound to keep up a good front, and mules does.

Molly sure loved mealtime. It used to be pure fun to set and watch her eat. I fixed her rations in big heaps. Her manners was always the best. She stood in her stall and waited her turn like a lady.

Another thing she loved was music. The banjo and gittar just about tickled her pink. 'Twere nice of summer nights with the stars all low and bright, setting on the steps picking and singing. Molly would be right at my shoulder listening. When I'd finished playing she'd cross the meadow and turn in to bed. She was awful smart, and I tried to show her how to dance a jig. If she caught the idee, she never let on, though. Maybe she was too dignified.

She liked a smack of chewing tobacco after her breakfast, and I usually give her some. She'd loll her head 'round and chew real good. Then she'd heave and spit the wad out far as the other side of the barn.

I remember when the time come to hitch her up. She just walked right into the harness as cool as a cucumber in the fall. She didn't shy none nor buck one bit. I had the leather all polished shiny as glass and I was right proud when I seen Molly all decked out.

As she growed older and bigger, she come to be the best field beast I ever had. She could plow through a row faster than a politician could hand out stogies. We set out early every day when the dew was fresh on ever'thing and we'd put in a good morning's work before we pulled up under the shade to rest and eat. The nicest treat of all was our noonday drink of water. We sure enjoyed that after the hot sun had done beat down on us all morning.

Molly was full of all sorts of cute tricks. She was crazy about warm milk and she'd come to the pasture gate and wait for some, but before she got it, I done had her trained to nod her head from side to side three times. Then another thing she done was to come outside the kitchen door and wait for me if I didn't show up prompt at six o'clock down at the barn.

We never did no work on Sunday. That was the day we took our fun, and unless the weather was too bad, come Sunday afternoon I'd put a saddle on Molly and we'd go off to the creek somewhere. Sometimes I'd fish and Molly'd graze on the bank, but before we came home I'd eat the lunch I carried along and give Molly some apples or pears.

Was a spell when I was sampling overmuch of my share of peach brandy. I seen a funny sort of gleam more than once in Molly's eyes when she looked at me. She knowed just as good as a person that I wasn't my rightful self, so to speak. She acted kind of mad.

Well, one day I took a few swigs and went down to hitch Molly to the plow. 'Cept for a few tantrums and arguments she had always been gentle as a lamb and stood still while I hooked the harness. But Lord! This day I'm telling of, she rared up high in the air and started pitching and kicking like old Satan himself was loose. She was about four years old then. In all the time I'd had her, she'd never pulled such a trick before. She was swishing her tail, jerking her mouth, and jumping up and down. It come to me that I'd better give up till she was in a more reasonable mind.

On the way back to the house I tried my best to figure out why that danged critter didn't see fit to help me with my corn. My wits was all confused though, and I couldn't make no progress thinking the reason out. I went into the kitchen and was setting there at the table kind of sleepy-like when I happened to notice the calendar on the wall. It was blurred and hopping about a little, but I made out the date. By gravy, it was Sunday! That peach juice had sure got me mixed up for a fare-you-well. No wonder Molly wouldn't plow. It was agin her bringing up.

That jenny-mule was wild about June apples and one time she et over her fill. The poor thing was rolling on her back on the ground. She looked bad sick in the face too, pale 'round the gills. I was sure worried nigh 'bout to death. I set with her a while and brushed the flies off. I offered her some water, but she wouldn't touch it. When I seen she wasn't getting no better, I sent a Negro boy into Siler for a horse doctor. In about a hour he come out and give Molly a big pink pill and before very long she was well.

She was awful loving-like after her sickness. Seemed to know she had nearly took her journey from this world. She'd come up close to my arm and put her head right against my hand to be scratched and petted.

That straw hat hanging on the wall there I bought one Saturday in town. It looked good on her, too. I cut the holes for her ears to stick out the top and she sure did like to dress up in it. I most always picked her a daisy or a rose to wear in the band.

Before I got the hat for her, she liked my flower garden. Used to push her nose under the wire and snip off sprouts and early leaves of my very best dahlias and petunias whenever she took a hankering for them. I was awful put out with her more times than one. But after I bought her the bonnet she was satisfied and left off her greedy ways.

Molly lived to be real old. When she died it give me a terrible jolt. We were friends and companions. I gave her a good Christian burial, and there's a nice boulder on her grave, back of the orchard. I guess I'll always keep the hat. Seems, when I look at it, that I can feel old Molly's nose a-rubbing between my shoulders, wanting to be fed an apple and scratched 'round the ears.



## The Cooter and the Alligator

Brevern and Sistern of the Swamp Root Sanctify Church: You parson, the Revern Brudder Mose Amboy, has ax me to substantiate for him today 'cause he has got a misery from eatin' too much fresh chitlin's down at Sister Chrysant'mum Freezor's hawg killin' yestiddy. He has ax me likewise to dissipate upon the subject of his back salary, for which he has not received a remittens for two months, come next Chusday.

Now, Brevern and Sistern, I knows and you knows that this ain't right and proper. I knows what yo'all gonna say; that the crops was porely and that you had'a pay you fertilize and store bills, and so on. And that Chris'mus come 'long and tooken what money you has got. I knows all them scuses.

But I's here this mornin' to tell you that what has gotta be done, *kin* be done, iffen you jes make up you mind that you gotta do it.

It puts me in mind of sumpin' what happen down in Louisanny, where I live when I's a lil boy.

Down in Louisanny they got great big swamps. Swamps bigger'n Mister Joe Fodner's whole farm; bigger'n this whole Rowan County, I reckon. Leastwise they's mighty big swamps.

Now in them swamps lives a lot'a animals and critters of the water, and earth, and sky. They's all kind of fishes, and mushrats, and snakes, and turkles what they calls cooters down there. Then they's alligators and possums to make you mouth water, and didapper ducks, and helldivers, and all kinds birds of fine plumage.

Well, they was a cooter, what yo'all calls a turkle, and they was a big ole bull alligator 'bout as long as this here

meetin'house. They both lives in the ole cypress swamp and they both hates each other. The cooter hates the allergator 'cause he knowed that ole allergator don't like nothin' better for brekfus, dinner, or supper than a good mouthful of cooter, and the allergator hates the cooter 'cause the cooter wouldn't never git where the allergator could git him for a mouthful.

The cooter would git right up 'side his hole in the ground and wait for the allergator to pass by ever' day. When he see the allergator's eyes stickin' up above the swamp water, he yell out and laff and make wisecrack at the allergator and call him "ole banjo eyes" and all such truck, and when the allergator climb outen the water on the bank to git after him, he would duck down in his hole under a big cypress root, where the allergator couldn't dig him out, and keep on hollerin' and makin' fun of the allergator. The allergator would champ his jaws and rattle his teeth 'round, he was so mad, but it didn't do no good, the cooter was allus too quick for him.

Well, by'mbye, they come a big rain and a flood, and the water come up and flooded the cooter's hole under the big root. He stay there long as he could, but after while he jes gotta come out and swim to the top.

And what you think he found there? Well, nothin' but the big allergator layin' there in the water a-waitin' for that very thing.

They see each other 'bout the same time and the allergator tears out for the cooter a-grinnin' and a-champin' his jaws. The cooter he tears out for he didn't know where, long as it was away from there. He sho had the where-to-goes!

The cooter he paddle as fast as he can go, but it warn't fast enough. The allergator keep snappin' right behind him, and ever snap was a lil bit closer. Jes when it look like the allergator a-goin' to snap up the cooter for his

dinner, the cooter look ahead and there was a big tree a-stickin' outen the water. It didn't take him no time atall to climb up that tree and git away from the ole bull allergator. He sit on the limb of the tree and he whoop and he yell at the ole allergator, and he makes more fun of him as ever before.

Wait a minnit, Brudder Johnson! That's what I knows you's a-goin' to say—they ain't no cooter what can climb a tree. I's sure glad you brung that matter up.

The cooter climbs the tree, I knows that, 'cause that's the way the story go. The reason he climb the tree is 'cause he *has* to climb the tree. It was a hard job, and he warn't 'zactly fixed to climb the tree, but he jes *had* to do it, and he done it.

And that's what I wants to impress upon you Brevern and Sistern. You ain't 'zactly fixed to get up Brudder Amboy's two months' salary and its a-gonna be a hard job. But yo'all is like the cooter; iffen you *got* to do it, then you jes *must* *kin*.

## Miss Nannie

For years old Miss Nannie has tried to tell all the folks in the county how to run their own critical affairs. Curious thing about it is that very few has ever stood up to the fixy old girl. Men and women has always given in to her in every way all the time. It's been, "Yes, mam, Miss Nannie, you are sure right about it," or, "No, Miss Nannie, I agree with you entire. I sure won't do it." Even when folks knew she was wrong they just gave way to the pesky old critter. That's what keeps a body unwholesome and hard to deal with, getting their own way and keeping on getting it.

First recollect I have of her I was a kid in school, no bigger than a tadpole, and awful shy. Miss Nannie were teaching then. There she would sit behind her desk, her small eyes boring right through you. Hair piled plain on top of her head and mouth clamped tight-shut over long teeth. She were about medium tall, and her skin were freckled some.

One morning she singled me out and says, "Come up to the blackboard and add these figures." I went on up there before the class, pimply, self-conscious, and mis'able bashful.

I couldn't make them numbers come out to save my soul from Satan. After I'd tried the third time, and the class a-tittering at me by now, and she seen I couldn't do it, Miss Nannie claps her old bony hands and she says, "Child, child, you don't know a thing! If I were to ask you your name real quick, I bet you couldn't tell me. What is it?"

I just stood there a-shaking from shame and anger, and to save my life I couldn't rightly recall my own name for a minute. She had me that addly.

Well, kids don't forget that kind of thing easy, and a

grown man don't neither. A fellow can stand a heap of things better than he can stand being made a fool of, and 'specially by a long-nosed, freckly-faced, horse-toothed, cantank'rous old maid. Anyways maybe I ought not to, but the fact is I've done bore this here childhood grudge all this time.

Miss Nannie got married, but Lord a-mercy, she drove the man off in less than a year. Her husband were a small grey-looking somebody, like a little old sick weasel. Folks was surprised that he ever got the guts to get out and run. He were weakly and a perfect doormat.

After she married she took to running a boardinghouse, but folks jes kept on calling her Miss Nannie. She hadn't no folks, and town people would a-felt sorry for her if she'd a-been a different kind of woman.

You should a-seen and heard her and her husband Tracy, come mealtime. She'd lean over to him and say, "Don't eat no more of that there corn. I don't feel like setting up with you tonight."

"Well, honey, you is right. I sure have et my share of grains," he would answer her, soft-like, and looking down at his plate. The boarders would feel sorry for the poor cuss.

Them two was a sight in church. "Don't set down so loud," she tells him, her voice a-carrying to the backest pew. If he give a dime in the collection plate, 'twere, "Why didn't you put in a quarter? Ain't you got no pride?" Did he put a quarter in, 'twere, "Lawdy me! Your extravagance will break us up for sartin."

Anyways, one morning she went in his room to nag the poor devil about something, but he'd done cleared out in the night-time, clean as a hound's tooth. Miss Nannie never seen him again, neither.

She were always a-telling widows that their husbands

would be alive today, but you have to give them the opposite of what they want.

Come weddings she nearly run the bride wild. "Your dress don't fit atall handy, leastways looks to me like it don't. You has sure chose your trousseau clothes impractical, too."

Got to be a byword in our village, whenever a youngun or a grownup either would act up, folks would say, "Don't be like Miss Nannie, now."

One day Sam Brooker were out in his field sizing up the vegetables. He was a-fingering a green pumpkin when Miss Nannie come by in her buggy. "You is sure a-picking them pumpkins too early, Sam. Pie won't be fitten for a hawg." Brooker never said nothing, jes laughed about it with the fellows over at the filling station.

She were always telling young mothers how to dose their new babies. Wasn't a doctor, lawyer, merchant, or grocer that she didn't try to boss.

When Preacher Matthews come around on his circuit she called him outside the church after meeting, and she says, "Brother Matthews, you has done took the wrong route to these poor sinners' holy souls. I don't believe you is even trying to save them." The parson were only a boy and not quite sure of hisself. He colored up some, but he didn't give her no back talk.

After her husband lit out she stuck to her boarding-house closer than ever. She couldn't never keep the same cook more than a short piece of days. She had nearly run through every Negro family in the county, I reckon, a-getting servants and they a-walking out on her their own selves. 'Twere, "Why for is you stewing that chicken? I wanted it fried for Sunday dinner," or, "That okra is done boiled near 'bout to pieces. You sure ain't got much sense." Next morning the cook just didn't show up.

Got to be kind of a joke about the darkeys a-leaving her.

Kids in town use to hide out behind the fence in Miss Nannie's yard, and stick out their tongues and say, "Who-all's a-cooking for you today, Miss Nannie?" She set on the porch a-fanning, a-paying them children no mind, or pretending not to, anyways.

Fellow hates to be mean about a lone widow lady, but you'd just have to be here in the village to understand and seems like she'd nag and torment a man's very liver out of him. 'Course none of us folks would think of letting no real sinful harm come to Miss Nannie.

Well, one spring Abe Ritzel moved to this county from Moore. He's a big powerful man with a black beard covering most of his face. Abe's well liked, 'cept when he gets his spells of stubs and his temper gets riled, which is higher than a Georgia pine. He's got a good farm a few miles from Mount Vernon Springs, and he grows 'backer, corn, and such.

Abe's got a whole passel of dogs. You never seen such a collection. They's collies, bulls, terriers, bird dogs, and about six rabbit hounds. Some concert when they sets up their howling of a moonlit night.

Ritzel has got him a big wooden barrel of dog dip set in back of his barn. He's fond of all his critters and he wants they should all be peart and purged from fleas and mange, so they is put in this barrel about once every two weeks, I reckon. One time Abe had him as fine a litter of bird pups as you ever seen.

One summer day he was out by the barrel a-fixing to dip them pups when happened he looked up acrost his fence. Miss Nannie was a-staring at him through the rails. He just couldn't stand her, but he forced himself to speak fair polite anyhow.

She never answered 'cause she were too busy a-watching his every move. Abe picked up a pup and just run its hind legs through the dip when Miss Nannie called out in that

sharp voice of hers, "Mr. Ritzel, you ain't a-dipping them dogs right. Their ears should go in first."

Abe's face got red as a beet, but he controlled himself, and picked up another pup. Miss Nannie straddled the fence and come on over, and says, "Mr. Ritzel, you sure is making a mistake the way you is going about this here job." She picked up one and says, "Poor little doggie, you is dipped all wrong."

Abe put the dog he was holding down careful, and he took off his hat easylike. He went over to Miss Nannie and says, "Shet your mouth," and grabbed her tight around the waist and picked her up in them stout sunburned arms of his, and carried her over to the barrel of dip.

Abe shoved her in head first and held her under a spell. Her feet was a-waving out of the top of the barrel and her legs was a-kicking.

When he let her up, he yelled, "Is that the right way to dip, ears first, or does you want I should try the other way around?"



## Bear Hunt in Reverse

Some men come down here in Onslow huntin' swamp bear, and sometime a man say to me, "Uncle Aaron, you wants to guide us on our bear hunt?" but I say, "No, suh, I don't guide nobody on no bear hunt. I has a good respeck fer them bear and all I ax is if the bear let me 'lone I lets the bear 'lone."

Them swamp bear are huge and pow'ful critters, sure 'nuf, and in the winter when they gits good and hungry they come outen the swamp and catches what they can and eats it. They come right in the pig sty and pick up a fat hawg and carry it off like nuffin' atall. They ain't no bear trap what'll hold one of 'em. I've seed bear traps all twisted to pieces where some big ole bear done pulled it offen his foot and beat it up on a tree or stump. Yes, suh, them swamp bear has got my respeck, and yo'all can hunt 'em all you please, but don't no cullud folks bother 'em none.

This time I's tellin' 'bout, when that bear hunt me, war eight year ago, in November. Mistah Bill Whitt had done kilt his hawgs and I help him, and Mistah Whitt say he pay me with fresh meat, sech as liver, and jowls, and haslets, and foots, and backbone, and some sa'sage, and chittlin's.

The day atter we butcher them hawgs, I hitch up my ole hoss to the car'yall, and drive the fo' mile to Mistah Whitt's place to git my meat. By time I had loaded up my meat, and help Mistah Whitt some 'bout the place cleanin' up, it war gittin' dark. Mistah Whitt he ask me did I have a gun, 'cause they might be some critters 'long the swamp road, but I say I don't have no gun, but iffen I move right 'long I reckon nuthin' goin' bother me none.

I gits 'long fine the first two mile, 'cause the moon shinin' bright and the road is out in the open, through cotton

patches and cleared fields, but 'bout half-way home the road drops down through the woods and the swamp on both sides.

Soon's I gits in the woods, it plum black dark, like it poured outen a tar bar'l. I couldn't see the road at first, but atter while I begin to make out the ruts and mud holes. It so dark, I begins to think I made a mistook, and I should a-stayed at Mistah Whitt's till mornin'. The wind what had been cold out in the open, now die down account the trees, but I heered it messin' with the dry leafs and rattlin' the daid limbs, then I heered somethin' else.

'Twar somethin' a-tween a growl and a grunt, and I look 'round and I see the biggest bear I ever hope to see this side of jedgment. He war big as a cow, and right aside the road, and look like he a-squattin' on his haunches, fixin' to jump up in the wagon.

I knows he's a smellin' that fresh meat in the back of the car'yall, and I knows som'thin' else—that a bear know the smell of a cullud pusson and all bear like to eat cullud folks.

I hits the hoss a lick with the switch, and he jump and the bear jump at the same time. The bear done cotch hold of the tailgate, and he pullin' hisself up, and I do the fust thing what comes to my mind, I grabs up a hawg haid and I throws it outen on the road.

The bear he let go and hops back to the hawg head, and he starts to eat it up. I keeps whippin' up the hoss and we movin' 'long top speed, lickety bump, down the road. Afore I gits fifty yard that bear done et up the hawg head and he take out atter us agin. Seem like we standin' still the way that bear gain on us. I never knowed a bear could run so fast, but I sure knows it now.

When the bear gits his nose even with the tailgate agin, I throws out 'nuther piece of meat, but the bear jes grab that outen the air and swaller it with one gulp. Look to me

like he goin' jump in the wagon, spite all I could do. I kept throwin' out the meat, but the more he got the more he wanted. I tied the reins 'round the footboard and let the hoss do his own runnin', 'cause the smell of that bear had done put him in top speed and he war doin' his bestest.

I crawl to the back of the car'yall, and jes set and throwed meat to the bear, but I could see these hunks was jes chicken-feed to him, and that all the hawg meat I had aboard wouldn't fill him up, and when all the hawg meat was gone they's nothin' left fer him but me and the hoss.

The hawg meat git lower and lower, and I git skeerder and skeerder. I thinks 'bout my burial 'surance, and how I's done paid fer a big funer'l, and morners, and ever'thin', but 'ffen that bear gits me they won't be nothin' left to bury.

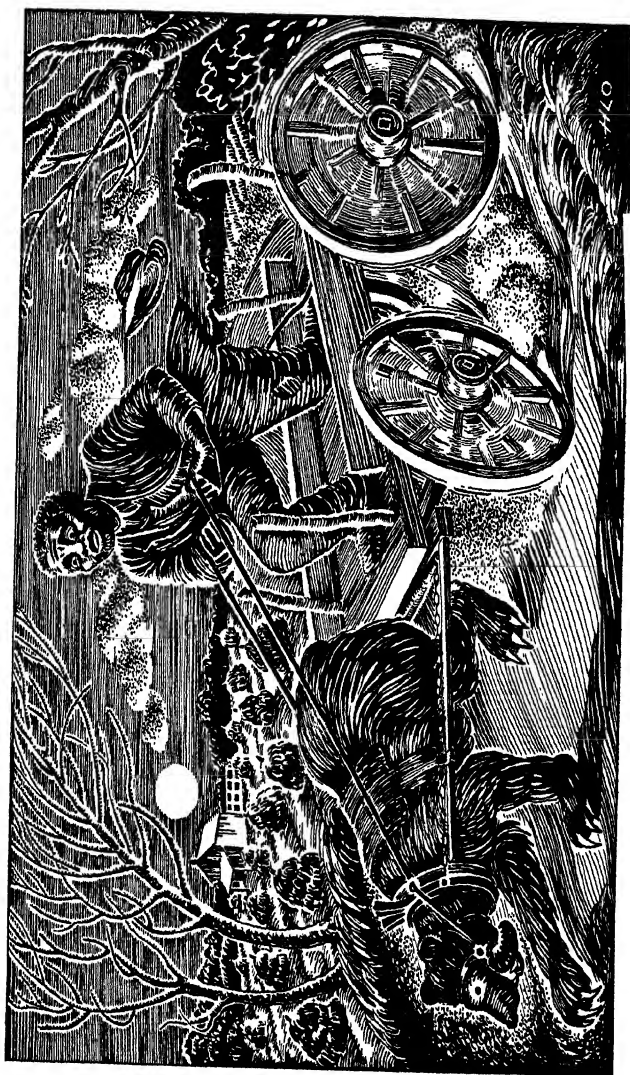
When I throwed out the last piece of hawg meat, I begins to pray.

"Lawd," say I, "do somethin' and do it quick, else it'll be too late. This here bear ain't waitin' fer nuthin' and nobody, but please, Lawd, don't let this bear be in no bigger hurry than You is."

I lay flat on the wagon bed, jes as the bear leaped over the tailgate. He overshoot the wagon, and seat, and landed slap dab on the hoss. I sure hated to lose that hoss, but I figger it's the hoss or me, and I can spare the hoss better'n I can spare me. I hear the bear a-crackin' and a-munchin' on the hoss, and I wonders should I run fer it, but I jes can't make up my mind, 'cause I knows that bear'd cotch me in three shakes of a lamb's tail.

I lay there shiverin' and listenin', and all 'toncet the wagon begins to move 'long. I reckon we's on a hill and a-coastin' down grade, but I wonders what keeps the shafts from a-cotchin' in the road, less the bear done et up the shafts, too.

The wagon gits to movin' faster and faster, and then we





comes outen the woods into the open, and the moon light all up, and I crawls up to the seat, and I'm blest iffen that'ar bear ain't in the harness, slicker'n a whissel, and a-pullin' the wagon 'long at a gallop.

He'd done et up the hoss, and he'd done et hisself all the way into the harness. The bridle was on his haid, and the bit was in his mouf. The bellyband was stretched tight 'round his middle, and the hamestraps was right on the whiffletree.

That war pie to me, and I drove him right on home as slick as you please, and lock him in the stable. He real quiet, and his belly is a-bulgin' full, and he lay right down in the straw and go to sleep.

I got the ole squirrel gun down, and I loaded it with all the powder and slugs I got, and I blowed that bear haid half off.

We never did miss that hawg meat, 'cause we got 'nuf bear meat to last all winter, and I didn't miss the hoss, nuther, 'cause I traded the bear skin fer 'nuther hoss. But that all the bear huntin' I want, and iffen they done leave me 'lone I's plum satisfied.

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## Sure-Shot Bessie

I was borned right here in these mountains, and since I was a boy I've knowed ever trail within twenty-five mile. My pappy were a gunsmith afore me and he teached me the trade. Pappy were the best gunsmith in four counties, and I wouldn't swap one of them ole muzzle-loaders fer all the britch-loading guns in the state. My pappy made the iron fer the barrels, and locks, and triggers. These mountains is jes full of iron ore. We had us a big furnace near Cranberry what we fired with hickory wood.

The iron were what you call mall'ble. Afore it was cold, we'd take strips of it and beat it out with a big hammer. Fer a rifle-gun we'd start with a iron rod, little smaller than the bore we wanted; then we'd beat red-hot strips 'round and 'round that iron bar. It would all weld together and we'd drill out the bore to make it smooth.

Pappy taught me all he knowed, but I made 'provements. I got to making the shotguns lighter. I fixed a drill what could be 'spanded as it went in toward the britch, so's the barrels was choke-bored. This kept the shot from spreading and made the range longer.

Well, as I say, them mountains was all full of iron. Natcherly all the plants, and grass, and greenery that grewed in the mountains had iron in 'em, though I didn't know that made any diff'rence till I made my bestest gun, what I called Ole Bessie.

Feller came to my shop one day and asks me did I ever use magnetic iron. I never heered tell of magnetic iron, but he says it's the strongest and toughest of all iron and he'll send me a bar of it. He did, and it were a pretty piece of iron—close-grain, with a fine blue shine to it. I knowed this were to be my bestest gun and I put all my skill into

making it. I fixed on a 8-gauge, which is over a 1-inch bore. I choked it heavier than airy one I ever made. It had a 44-inch barrel.

First time I drew down on a buck deer at a hunner yards the deer were tore all to pieces. I saw right away this were a extry-long range gun. So I upped the range, but even at 300 yards the game were tore up.

I stretched the range more and more, and I suspeck something quare about Ole Bessie. It never did miss what I were aiming at. I got me a spyglass to spy game far off enough so's the shot wouldn't tear up the meat. When I drewed a bead I'd feel the gun pulling a little thisaway or that and I'd let Bessie have her way, pull the trigger, and go get my game.

I couldn't figger it, so I axed the school-perfessor at Hollow Crick, and what do you suppose that perfessor-feller says? He says it's all according to the laws of physic, though I don't see what castor oil has got to do with Ole Bessie. He says all them animals been feeding on things growed full of iron. That puts iron in the critters, and the iron in the critters draws the bead on my magnetic gun barrel.

As I say, it don't make sense to me, and I believe that gun's charmed. Anyway one day I loaded Ole Bessie up with buckshot and rammed it in good and went up into the bear country right back of Round Bald. Finally I picked up a big bear through my spyglass. He was feeding in the open. I took dead aim, felt Bessie right herself, and pulled the trigger. In about five minutes I see the bear roll over. I started off to get my meat, but even without stopping it were noon two days later afore I got to him. He were dead so long that the meat were spoilt.

Well, I could see it's no use killing meat I couldn't use, and I had to think up a way to get around that. Then I had a idee.



Next time I went hunting I loaded Ole Bessie with half buckshot and half rocksalt. I were way back of Ole Roan when I sighted a deer with the spyglass. Same as usual I cut down, and the deer kicked over. When I came up on that buck I found the salt had done a good job of curing the meat. So then me and Bessie went out hunting any ole time, shooting game as we seed it, letting it lie until we get in that neighborhood. It sure saved a lot of time and trouble.

In a few years they begun opening up iron mines and digging the iron out of them hills. Don't know whether it were that, or Ole Bessie began wearing out, or what, but I took to missing so bad I give the ole gun away. Mebbe that perfessor-feller were right.

## Sisterene

I's a life believer and a Sisterene of the Lord. He's done already took me to heaven on a visit. He 'vited me up to 'tend the Feast of the Passover and to show me that heaven wasn't built with no hammer and nails, but that it was built by His own thinkin' and plannin'.

I's a worker, an earthly worker of the Lord. He gives me special privileges, such as spiritual doctorin' and faith healin'. The power of spiritual doctorin' comes through the hands. I's got healin' hands. I calls the spirits to the bedside of the sick, and they lay they hands with mine on the sick body and the pain leaves. I prays, you prays, and other folks prays till a whole ring of prayer is wropped right 'round the sick person, squeezin' out the sickness. I's privilege in more ways than one 'cause the Lord done made me a Sisterene. That's how come He 'vited me up to heaven.

'Twas early one mornin'. I'd done washed the breakfast dishes and was sweepin' up the kitchen floor when a voice come out from nowhere and say: "Stop that sweepin', Rebecca, and set down. I wants to talk to you."

I knew 'twas the Lord, so I say, "Yes, Lord, I shorely will." Then I stands the broom up in the corner and sets down. Then He said: "Rebecca, I wants you to come up to My heavenly house and look 'round, for some day you's goin' come up there to stay and I wants you to see what it's like, then I wants you to stay to the Feast of the Passover. You's got a right to do this 'cause I's done blessed you and made you a Sisterene. Now, put on these golden shoes to keep your feets offen the ground, for no human feets ain't never touched the holy ground of My city. Now shut your eyes and don't open 'em till I tells you."

I still didn't see nobody, but I done like He told me. I

put on the gold shoes with the gold buckles He set down 'side me, and I shut my eyes, and lifted my hands with palms up in submission, and begin to pray. I felt my feet leave the floor; my body left the chair where I was settin'. I felt the ceilin' and roof open to let me through, and as I went up, I heard the stirrin' of wings all about me and the low sound of music and singin'. That was the sweetest floatin' I ever had in all my life. I don't know which road I took to heaven, but when the Lord told me to open my eyes, I opened 'em and I was there.

Bein' in heaven is like bein' in a big city 'cept they's no 'lectric lights and no sun, moon, and stars. The lights was bright and shinin', though prettier and brighter than any lights that comes from anythin' on earth, for all over this Glory Land was diamond fruit trees. The light from this diamond fruit lit up and glittered up the place 'twell it hurt your eyes and they wasn't never no night there. These trees and all the leaves was made of solid silver, and the fruit hangin' thick and clost was diamonds bigger than grapefruit, and on the tip-top of every tree was a diamond big as a half bushel what glittered up so bright you couldn't look at 'em. The streets was silver, wide and long, with no corners to turn, and the place was divided into four parts.

The first part is called Division of Assortment. It is the fullest 'cause this is the division where everybody is sent when they first get to heaven. They's sent there for they sins to be checked and sorted out, and if they's worthy and repent and they sins ain't too black, they is cleansed and moved up to a higher division. I saw some folks I knowed and some I didn't know, but I didn't speak to nobody and nobody didn't speak to me 'cause I had on gold shoes and they knowed I was from the earth. But they knowed I was a Sisterene privilege by the Lord to visit His Glory Land and they give me the high sign of welcome, which was to lift they right hand and make the sign of a cross.

All these folks wore scarlet robes, showin' they sins hadn't been checked and sorted out.

The second division is called Penalty Square. They is right smart folks here, but not as many as is in the Division of Assortment, and they robes done been lightened. They was cream-colored with scarlet sashes and bands on the sleeves. This showed they sins done been lessened and they done been promoted up. They blackest sins done been washed away by tears of sorrow and repentance, and they had a chance in Penalty Square to pray and chastise theyselves so's to reach a final reward. The folks was millin' 'round and talkin' same as they do here on earth.

The third division is Paradise. In here is all the folks what's done been cleansed of all they sins and they's waitin' for the call to enter the Kingdom. They ain't so mighty many folks in this division, but them that was there had faces that was bright and shinin' as a lighted lamp on a dark night. 'Twas they clean souls shinin' through, souls that has been washed clean of they sins and was white as carded wool. These folks done found both peace and contentment, and they robes was pure cream-color with no touch of sinful scarlet, 'cause they done been forgiven and they was ready for the signal to enter the Kingdom when they'd put on the silver robes of righteousness. These folks was shoutin'—joy shoutin'—and singin' songs, and they was a invisible band somewhere playin' glad tidings music. It was a happy place.

Now the fourth division is the Lord's Kingdom. The door to the wall 'round it was shut, and nobody was 'lowed to see inside. Nobody could see inside till the Final Day. The kingdom was hid by a high silver wall surrounded by diamond fruit trees what lit up the tall silver gate where six angels stood guardin' it with three swords of flamin' fire in each hand. In this kingdom the Lord and Gabriel lives by theyselves, and, when Gabriel lifts that golden horn

and blows for the Judgment Day, the angels guardin' the gate is goin' to fling down the swords of fire and that silver gate's goin' to be flung wide and all them that's ready and free of sin is goin' to march into that mighty kingdom. And the minute they enter, they robes is goin' to be changed to silver, a talisman is goin' to be put into they hands, and they's goin' to be blessed and glorified.

By the time I finished lookin' 'round heaven it was time to go to the Feast of the Passover I done been 'vited to, so I went 'round to the banquet hall. The feast was held in a big silver house with a long banquet hall where they was a table reachin' from the front to the back door with a angel standin' behind every chair 'cept one what was left for me. Everythin' was silver—the walls, the floor, chairs, and everythin'. The table cloth was silver, too, and hung clean down to the floor; all the dishes, goblets, and candlesticks was solid silver. The candles was silver too and they didn't have no wicks, but they was burnin' just the same, givin' out a silver light and the light from the diamond fruit on the diamond fruit trees in the yard come right through the open windows and shined bright on the table. They was silver telephones hangin' all 'round the walls with a angel by each 'phone to answer when they rang. These angels didn't have no crowns, but they had a silver chain 'round they heads with a silver star hangin' down in the middle of they foreheads.

A tall angel with a silver crown what had three silver stars on top come and led me to the banquet table and set me down in the big silver chair at the head. Angels in long white robes and plain silver crowns without no stars served the feast. The first thing they served was the diamond fruit off the diamond fruit trees. They served this cut in half like we has grapefruit, but they didn't look like our grapefruit; the rind was crusted diamonds and the inside was bright pink. They served sugar with it only

they didn't call it sugar, they called it Sacred Sweetnin'. The next course was Biblical Dessert. It was strawberry ice cream froze in the shape of little angels and the berries was bright green instead of red and it had a hard icin' over it that was crusty, but it was soft inside. With this they has Hallelujah Cake what was snow-white and had Redemption Sauce poured over it. This sauce was blood-red and tasted like sassafras only 'twas sweeter. I don't know why they served the sweetest first, but they did.

Then come along a big silver plate. On it was a whole fryin'-size chicken what they called a Gospel Bird. With it was somethin' that looked like turnip sallet, but they said 'twas Glorified Greens, and creamed taters was Divine Snow. The bread was thin, white, and bitter. It was cut in little round balls 'bout the size of big marbles and near 'bout hard as marbles. 'Twas called Holy Manna. The coffee was thick and a pale blue and 'twas cold instead of hot. It tasted like coffee, but 'twas spoken of as Blessed Juice. After this the pie was set on the table. This pie was so big that it took fourteen angels to tote it. They set it on the table, and it reached from side to side. 'Twas big enough for everybody at that banquet table to get a slice, and they musta been two or three hundred settin' down. It was a apple pie. The apples come from the Garden of Eden. They come off the same tree that Eve stole the apple to tempt Adam with, and talk about taste ticklin'! that truck taste-tickled all the way down and called for more. Now, this pie had a heavenly name like all the other food. It was Compassion Jujube and 'twas served with Celestial Syrup. Along with this they give us a tall glass of Spiritual Liquid. This was a red wine that was lumpy like butter-milk, and the lumps was brown and sweet same as lumps of brown sugar.

Nobody spoke a word durin' the feast. Not even the angels that was servin' spoke to each other. They wasn't

but one voice that come into that banquet hall and that was while we all set in our silver chairs drinkin' the Spiritual Liquid. Then the big silver telephone at the end of the hall rung. The angel watchin' it took it off the hook, and the minute the voice come out of it I knew 'twas the Lord's. I knew 'cause I'd heard it so many times before when He'd come to my house and talk to me.

He gave his blessin' on everybody; then he said: "Rebecca, my Sisterene, you's welcome here. You's just seein' your future home, 'cause I's done fixed a place for you in my Kingdom and some day you's comin' up here to live, and you's goin' to be made a honor member of the Band of Silver Angels what sings 'round the throne; they'll be a three-star crown on your head and a songbook in your hand." Then He told me when I'd finished the feast to close my eyes and He'd take me back to the earth.

I done like He told me. When I finished drinkin' the last drop of Spiritual Liquid, I raised my hands with the palms upward and shut my eyes. Then I thanked the Lord for 'lowin' me to visit the Glory Land and told Him I was ready to go. I felt my feets rise off the floor, and my body started floatin' like I was ridin' on a cloud and I felt myself goin' down soft and easylike. When I opened my eyes, my gold shoes was gone and I was settin' in my chair in my kitchen and the broom was standin' in the corner just like I left it.

I's done been to heaven and seen it with my own eyes. I don't know how come, but I knows I ain't goin' to be missin' when my time comes. The Lord's done told me He's fixed a high seat in His Kingdom for me, and I's shorely goin' set in that seat.

## Rode by Witches

My pappy believed in witches and laid all our bad luck to their deviltry. He went to lots of trouble fixing up charms to keep 'em away and break their power. Pappy'd always sleep with a silver fork under his piller, and many's the time I see him put a broom on the floor in front of the door. When all the charms he knew failed, he'd go to the witch doctor for help.

First trouble I had with witches was when I was sixteen year old. I woke up one night, and there at the foot of the bed was a ugly old hag with stringy gray hair, a long pointed nose, yaller teeth, and eyes what looked like holes burned in wropping paper. I let out a yell and kicked and fought, but she got a bridle bit in my mouth and I saw I was changed to a hoss.

I was plum helpless. She got on my back and kicked me with her heels until we was going over the ground like we was flying. She run me until I was near fagged out, and we come to a shack. She got off and tied me to a peach tree in the yard where a lot of other hosses was tied up too. There was a dozen other witches inside and they had a big dance. I looked at myself and I see I was a big strapping bay hoss, as slick as anything. I talked to the other hosses, and we tried to think up some way to drive the witches away.

We was there till nigh daybreak. The witches kept dancing and capering. One made music by beating a dishpan and another rattled a stick on a skull. I never heard such a howling and carrying on in my born days. Every one of them ole witches toted a black cat on her shoulder, and every time a witch hollered her cat'd let out a yowl.

When the first streak of light showed in the east, the



witches put out the green fire on the hearth and hid the skull and pot they'd boiled their midnight supper in. Then they come out and crawled up on our backs. My witch kicked me in the sides agin, and we flew back home and landed in my yard. The ole hag took the bit outen my mouth, and I was changed back to myself agin. I was too wore out to git back in bed, and pappy found me lying on the floor.

The ole witch rode me most every night after that. Sometimes she'd change herself into diff'rent things. Once she was a rabbit, agin she was a turkey-hen, or a mouse, and couple of times a cat. Some nights she'd take a short ride, and agin she'd ride all night long. Oncet a week they'd have their dance in the shack, and then I'd stand and talk to the other hosses. Sometimes my ole witch'd get drunk as a lord and then she'd jerk the reins until my mouth'd be black and blue. I couldn't eat and was getting puny and sickly. I was too beat out in the morning to get outten bed.

At first I was afraid to tell pappy, figuring the ole witch'd make it harder on me, but when I fin'ly told him he said something's got to be done or I'd wither away and die. He tried putting the flour sifter over the keyhole, laying the broom in front of the door, putting the Bible and silver fork under my piller, and burying a brown bottle under the doorsteps. Mammy put needles, and pins, and tacks around my bed, but none of it didn't do no good.

One morning pappy says he's going to take the day off and see the witch doctor. He hitched the mules to the wagon and me and him drove to the witch doctor. Pappy had to cross his palm with a piece of silver money before he could begin.

Time the witch doctor seen me he knowed right away the witch'd been riding me, and soon as he look in my eye-balls he knowed it was a colored woman. Pappy told him

all the charms we'd used, but the witch doctor say the witch got her power direct from the devil and nothing would stop her but death.

He set down and drawed a pitcher of a woman with a piece of charcoal. Then he took his muzzle-loading rifle, poured in some gunpowder, and pushed down a wad with a piece of silver. Then he capped the gun and told me to come with him to the woods.

When we got down in the woods, he tacked the pitcher to a big sycamore tree and give me the gun. He told me he had to walk a piece back in the woods and when he yelled "Ready!" for me to take good aim and hit the pitcher as near the heart as I could.

He went off and left me standing there scared to death. The wind got to moaning, and the thunder rumbling and shaking the earth, and the lightning cracking all 'round me. I got scareder and scareder. I tried to aim at the pitcher, but my hands was shaking so bad I thought I'd drop the gun. When he hollered to shoot, I pulled the trigger and by accident the bullet hit the heart, and then I fell fainting on the ground.

When we got home, we heerd a colored woman had dropped dead in the field near us. Then I knowed I was rid of the witch for good.

I kept thinking about them other poor hosses and I figgered to do something about 'em. I didn't know where that dance shack was, many times as I'd been there with the ole witch, but I made up my mind I'd find it. One morning I started out and I walked all day long, and 'bout night I found the shack. I saw it was dance night for the witches so I hid in the woods till they all got there. After I see the last one had come, riding a bull yearling, I slipped out and went from hoss to hoss telling 'em to shoot the ole witches' pitchers so they wouldn't have to be rid no more.

They all promised to do it and I set down to talk to

'em thinking I was safe, but one ole hag'd left her snuff-box in the saddlebags and come out fer it. I jumped up and run, with her right behind me, and I reckon she'd of caught me if I hadn't jumped in the river. A witch can't swim a lick, you know. I stayed in the water till she went back to the house and then I went on back home.

The next week I went back to the shack to find out if I had done the hosses any good. What I expected to find out was that all the witches was dead, but after a while some of 'em commenced to come hobbling and limping in. They was walking, all 'cept the witch that had the bull yearling, and I was glad to hear 'em complaining of being tired and hurting. One of 'em said, "We'd all be dancing with the devil if them fools had sense enough to shoot straight. I don't reckon we can dance no more, but we'll have to do something."

They talked what they could do and showed where the bullets had hit 'em. They talked this and that and argued till 'bout daybreak. Fin'ly they settled it. Since they couldn't ride no more and dance no more, they decided to lay low until they all healed up, and then move to Georgia, where folks didn't know about silver bullets.

## Quality Folks

You can talk what you please 'bout quality folks, give me a ole-time lady like my Miss Harriet ever time. I was borned 'afore Freedom. My mammy was a slave so I was a slave too and belonged to Massa John and Miss Harriet. They had lots of land on their plantation and lots of slaves to work it. Massa John was good to us, but he made us work hard. Jes same, Miss Harriet was the real boss of the plantation. She allus see to it we had plenty to eat and good warm clo'es to wear. Iffen any slave was ailin' or hurted she'd visit 'em herself and dose 'em up till they was well. When she come to see us she allus carried a little kivered basket on her arm and in that basket she had all kinds of medicine. There was a big bottle of castor oil, a package of quinine, a tall bottle of tonic bitters, some liniment, and a bundle of clean white rags.

Of course all the Negro women knowed how to make yarb teas and poultices and sech, but Miss Harriet was the onliest one what had real medicine. She looked atter the women with new babies and sick chillun and she knew how to set a broken arm or leg. I ain't never seen no doctor come to the plantation 'cept when some of the white folks at the big house was ailin'.

Miss Harriet was a still sort of woman. She never said much, but when she did speak ever'budy jumped. My mammy, who was Miss Harriet's maid, say she was pure quality folks. Said she stayed to herself so much 'cause nobody in the neighborhood was good enough for her. When I fust knowed Miss Harriet she was 'bout fifty but straight as a ramrod and quick like a bird. She was teensy, never weighed more'n a hundred pound, but she was so dignify and held her head so high she seem tall. She was

allus dressed fine, and her thick gray hair was parted in the middle and pulled down over her ears into a big knot at the back of her neck. One gray curl hanged from the knot down over her left shoulder. I never see her with airy hair out of place or a speck of dirt on her. Her eyes was bright blue, and her little mouth was as pink as a rose bud. The skin of her face and hands was dead white like a camellia blossom, and she set great store by her complexion.

Miss Harriet stayed indoors most of the time, but when she did go out she wore a wide-brim hat and a veil over her face, and gloves, even in the hottest weather. Mammy used to fotch dew or rainwater for Miss Harriet to wash her face and was allus a-stewin' a mess of cucumbers and strawberries and rose leaves to make skin lotions. Miss Harriet warn't 'zactly beautiful, but she was so cool and seem like she jes floated 'stead of walkin' that she put you in mind of a queen. Her voice was low and sweet, and she never hurry or get excited, no matter what.

Miss Harriet never did no work 'cause mammy waited on her hand and foot and a little Negro girl allus followed her 'round with her fan and shawl and book and sunshade. When Miss Harriet "took the air," as she say, this girl swept the path in front of her with a corn-shuck broom so's not to dirty her little shoes. Yes, Miss Harriet was a real lady. You don't see nairy like her now-a-days.

Miss Harriet and Massa John only had one chile, Massa Charlie. Miss Harriet allus pine for a daughter, so one day Massa John went to New York and fatched back his little niece, Miss Flora. Miss Harriet was mighty pleased and dressed the little thing up like a doll. Miss Flora warn't never sent to school like common chillun. A lady teacher come to live at the house and teachd the gal her lessons and manners. A gen'leman come twicet a week to teach her music.

Miss Harriet say Miss Flora must have her own maid

and tole mammy to find a smart lil colored gal 'bout Miss Flora's age. I'd been put to work waitin' on the women what worked in the sewin' room makin' clo'es for the hands. When mammy tole us what was wanted I jes prayed they'd take me. Sure 'nuff, when mammy fotched three of us little gals 'fore Miss Harriet, she choosed me. I must stay with Miss Flora ever minute, day and night. I must play with her and wait on her and sleep on the floor 'side her bed. We warn't suppose to run or shout or get overheated or get dirty or nothin', jes walk 'round like little ladies! Miss Flora tried to do like Miss Harriet say and be like her, but sometime she sneak off and play with the black chillun. She looked jes like a pretty white dove 'mongst a passel of blackbirds. Ever'body loved her 'cause she was good to ever'body, black and white.

Miss Harriet never changed her way of doin' atter Miss Flora come. She jes went on quiet-like, spendin' most of her time settin' in the dark parlor with a book and a fan and her little Negro gal to wait on her.

Massa Charlie warn't like his Ma nor his Pa nuther. He mighty wild and drink a heap. Ever once in a while he'd git on a terrible spree, but Massa John and the servants tried to keep Miss Harriet from knowin' anythin' 'bout it. If she ever guess, she never let on but kept right on rockin' and fannin' in her little chair by the window of the parlor.

One day they was a awful racket. 'Round the curve of the driveway what led up to the house come Miss Harriet's big carriage what she only used on 'portant 'casions. All rared back in the seat was Massa Charlie, cracking a long whup over the backs of six Negro boys he had hitched up in place of hosses. He had 'em galloping too, and ever little bit he'd reach out and slash one of 'em with the whup. The boys was a-sweatin' and a-groanin', but he jes laughed and took another swig from his liquor bottle while the servants stood 'roun' beggin' him to stop.

Miss Flora was standin' on the po'ch when they came by and she started to cry and wring her hands. Miss Harriet heard the fuss and looked out the window. That's the onliest time we ever see her hurry or heerd her speak sharp to her son. She sailed outen that room and onto the po'ch without seemin' to touch the floor. Jes as the carriage came by the steps she raised her little hand.

"Stop, instantly!" she say, and the boys stopped daid in they tracks while Massa Charlie's mouth flew open. "Untie those boys," she said to one of the hands. "Now take them to their quarters and wash they backs with kerosene." The boys sneaked off, draggin' the carriage with 'em. Massa Charlie stepped down and stood swaying from side to side, and lookin' foolish.

"Charles, you are disgustin' dirty," say his mother. "And drunk. You better bathe and dress for dinner at once."

It warn't long till the war broke out and things begin to change. Massa Charlie jined the army, and Massa John got too ole and feeble to look atter things right. The slaves begin to run off till fin'ly there was only a handful of us left. One day ole Uncle Jake come runnin' in the house.

"The Yankees is comin'! The Yankees is comin'!" he say. "And Miss Flora's done gone to ride on Jack. The silver is all buried in the woods and all the hosses 'cept him is hid away, but now the Yankees'll git him, sure as shootin'."

Jes then we heard a clatter of hoofs, and up the driveway come ole Jack at his fastes' gallop. Lyin' flat on his neck was Miss Flora, laughin' and cryin' all at the same time. She slid off 'fore she stopped, and Uncle Jake was in the saddle and gone. There was a bullet hole in Miss Flora's bonnet, and Miss Harriet sent her little Negro girl to tell Miss Flora to come in at once. The ole lady looked calm at the tousle girl.

"Flora, I'm surprise. You should stay out of the hot sun. It will ruin your skin!" Then she called mammy. "Put Miss Flora's hair in order at oncet and while you're 'bout it, roll this jewelry up in her hair." So in Miss Flora's hair went all the rings and bracelets and brooches what Miss Harriet used to wear.

We waited all afternoon for the sojers to come. All the hands quit work and come and set on the floor 'round Miss Harriet. The young'uns crawled under her chair where they was hid by her skirts. Poor ole Massa John set with his head bowed and never said nothin'! The Negroes all moaned and prayed out loud, and Miss Flora walked back and fo'th from the window to the door. But Miss Harriet jes sat with her open book in her lap, a-fannin' and a-rockin'.

'Long to'ard sundown we could see fires down the valley where the Yankee sojers was burnin' all the houses and barns. They come closeter and closeter and at last we heerd the clatter and rattle of the sojers a-comin'. They poured into the yard, trompin' all Miss Harriet's purty flowers. Then they bust in the kitchen door and started messin' in ever'thing. Fust they grabbed all the bread and meat they could find and gobbled it down. Then they upset two lard cans full of 'lasses. Them sojers jes licked that 'lasses up without no bread or spoon. When that was gone they went through the house upsettin' furniture and breakin' dishes.

"Jes stay quiet where you are," Miss Harriet say to the servants, but we could see her twinge when a special loud crash come.

The sojers went into the bedrooms and ripped open the pillers and feather beds, huntin' for money and vallables till it looked like a snowstorm. Then they didn't seem to know what devilment to do next. By this time seem like Miss Harriet done seen 'nuff. She stood up with her little head in the air, and her poor Negro folks huddled 'round her little foots.



"You've done 'nuff damage," she say. "Please go and leave us in peace."

The sojers was so surprise they begin to back out and some of 'em pulled off their hats.

One big sojer say to Miss Flora, who was a-sobbin' over the busted furniture, "Don't cry, sissy. We won't do no more harm. We was ordered to burn this place, but we won't."

Then Miss Harriet say, "Young man, you'd better obey orders. If you belonged to me I'd have you whapped!" She slammed the door, and the sojers sneaked off and never bothered us no more.

## The Headless Hant

A man and his wife was going along the big road. It was cold and the road was muddy and sticky red, and their feet was mighty nigh froze off, and they was hungry, and it got pitch dark before they got where they was going.

'Twan't long before they came to a big fine house with smoke coming outen the chimley and a fire shining through the winder. It was the kind of a house rich folks lives in, so they went 'round to the back door and knocked on the back porch. Somebody say, "Come in!" They went in, but they didn't see nobody.

They looked all up and down and all 'round, but still they didn't see nobody. They saw the fire on the hearth with the skilletts setting in it all ready for supper to be cooked in 'em. They saw there was meat and flour and lard and salsody and a pot of beans smoking and a rabbit a-biling in a covered pot.

Still they didn't see nobody, but they saw everything was ready for somebody. The woman took off her wet shoes and stockings to warm her feet at the fire, and the man took the bucket and lit out for the springhouse to get fresh water for the coffee. They 'lowed they was going to have them brown beans and that molly cottontail and that corn-bread and hot coffee in three shakes.

The woman was toasting her feet when right through the shut door in walks a man and he don't have no head. He had on his britches and his shoes and his galluses and his vest and his coat and his shirt and his collar, but he don't have no head. Jes raw neck and bloody stump.

And he started to tell the woman, without no mouth to tell her with, how come he happened to come in there that a-way. She mighty nigh jumped outen her skin, but she

said, "What in the name of the Lord do you want?" So he said he's in awful misery, being dead and buried in two pieces. He said somebody kilt him for his money and took him to the cellar and buried him in two pieces, his head in one place and his corpse in 'nother. He said them robbers dug all 'round trying to find his money, and when they didn't find it they went off and left him in two pieces, so now he hankers to be put back together so's to get rid of his misery.

Then the hant said some other folks had been there and asked him what he wanted but they didn't say in the name of the Lord, and 'cause she did is how come he could tell her 'bout his misery.

'Bout that time the woman's husband came back from the springhouse with the bucket of water to make the coffee with and set the bucket on the shelf before he saw the hant. Then he saw the hant with the bloody joint of his neck sticking up and he come nigh jumping outen his skin.

Then the wife told the hant who her husband is, and the hant begun at the start and told it all over agin 'bout how come he is the way he is. He told 'em if they'd come down into the cellar and find his head and bury him all in one grave he'd make 'em rich.

They said they would and that they'd get a torch.

The hant said, "Don't need no torch." And he went up to the fire and stuck his front finger in it and it blazed up like a lightwood knot and he led the way down to the cellar by the light.

They went a long way down steps before they came to the cellar. Then the hant say, "Here's where my head's buried and over here's where the rest of me's buried. Now yo'all dig right over yonder where I throw this spot of light and dig till you touch my barrels of gold and silver money."

So they dug and dug and sure nuff they found the barrels of money he'd covered up with the thick cellar floor. Then

they dug up the hant's head and histed the thing on the spade. The hant jes reached over and picked the head off the spade and put it on his neck. Then he took off his burning finger and stuck it in a candlestick on a box, and still holding on his head, he crawled back into the hole that he had come out of.

And from under the ground they heard him a-saying, "Yo'all can have my land, can have my house, can have all my money and be as rich as I was, 'cause you buried me in one piece together, head and corpse."

Then they took the candlestick blazing with the hant's finger and went back upstairs and washed themselves with lye soap. Then the woman made up the cornbread with the spring water and greased the skillet with hogmeat and put in the hoecake and lifted the lid on with the tongs and put coals of fire on top of the lid and 'round the edges of the skillet, and cooked the hoecake done. Her man put the coffee and water in the pot and set it on the trivet to boil. Then they et that supper of them beans and that rabbit and that hoecake and hot coffee. And they lived there all their lives and had barrels of money to buy vittels and clothes with. And they never heard no more 'bout the man that came upstairs without no head where his head ought to be.

## Old Skinny

When I was a young feller I rambled a lot, jes lookin' 'round and visitin'. I run over the country 'cause I liked it, and I reckon I jes got the habit. I 'spect I went over ever county in seben or eight states. Durin' all them years of ramblin' 'round I ain't seen but one thing I didn't like and that's the very reason I ain't rambled no more atter'ards. I'll tell you 'bout ole Skinny, but I 'spect I better tell you 'bout what happen fust.

I was way down in the eastern part of the state whur they tells me they's hants and other quare things a'plenty. I stayed down in that neighborhood nigh onto a month and I didn't find a thing whut I could do. There warn't no jobs 'cept whut had a whole heap of work in 'em and they warn't no rich widders whut wanted to marry a pert-lookin' man for his company. I was a-gittin' mighty disgust with the whole thing and was a-fixin' to git myself back home and marry a smart 'oman what was willin' to work for a man. I ain't got no way to go 'cept walk, but I walks along pretty pert. I thought I was a-goin' west, but it turns out that I was a-goin' east. It was a cloudy day, and they warn't no sun a-shinin' to guide me by. After a while dark come on and I was still a-walkin'.

I walked and I walked, and the longer I walked, the mo' dark it git and I'm so tard that I don't feel like I can make 'nother step. Way atter a while I gives plum out and sets down on a log to rest. I looks through the woods in front of me and then I turns 'round and looks through the woods in back of me. Well, I seed a lil light way off through the woods and I think to myself at fust that it am a jacky-melantern, but atter a while I sees that it sets as steady as a stump. It looks like a candlelight to me, so atter I makes up

my mind that I can't set outdoors in the cold drizzle all night long, I heads to'rds the lil light.

You might'n believe me, but I walked seben or eight mile 'fore I come to the light. It was a lamplight and it was a-shinin' in a lil winder. I don't know what to do, but I settles myself and goes up to the do' and knocks. I knocks so long that I 'cides they ain't nobody to home, but torreckly a ole 'oman comes to the do' and she say, "What you want?"

I tells her that I is a stranger and a pore boy long ways from home. I says I's hongry and I ain't got no place to sleep. She stand there and look at me for a minute; then she say, "Is you married?"

I say, "No, I ain't married, but I's lookin' for a good smart wife."

"Come in," she says, real hearty. "Come on in and git some supper and set by the fire. I'll fix you up the bestest bed in the house. Black boy, I thinks you is found the right 'oman."

She is a ole hag with jes 'bout two front tooths and no back'ns. Her hair is white as the snow, and her back is crooked as the rainbow. I was a good-lookin' young buck and I didn't want that ole gram'ma on no terms atall, but it was dark and cold and rainy and I was hongry, and tard, and sleepy. I went on in behind her.

She give me the bestest supper I ever poppled my bill on and atter that she sets and talks to me a while. The clock say eleben-thirty when she shows me my bed and say for me to sleep good that she's got to go out for a lil spell.

I tells her that it am dark and still rainin' and that no 'oman ain't got no business outside on a night like this'n. She jes laff and say that it a nice night to be out and she likes the weather.

Well, I was so tard that I didn't think nothin' 'bout it. I jes went to bed and slept like a log. I didn't think

nothin' 'bout it the next day nuther 'cause she kept me busy all day long. She give me the bestest chair in the house and she put pillers to my back and she fed me like I was a king. We had turnip greens, stewed rabbit, pickled cucumbers, corn pone, bi'led shoulder, and huckleberry pie. I ain't never et so much, and she'd keep on a-saying', "Honey, eat some more. Thar's plenty and more where that come from."

All the whole day she stuffs me and makes honey-love to me, but at eleben-thirty she gits me off to bed and say that she goin' out for a lil while. I was so sleepy and so full that I sleep like a log and I ain't thought nothin' 'bout it.

The day goes on and I is feelin' so good that when she say we'd ought to git married I say it's a good idee. She jumps up and say, "Whoopee!"

Well, we 'cides, that is, she does, to git married the very next day. I thought that she'd stay home with me that night, but she didn't.

'Long 'bout ten-thirty she say, "Does you know that I's one of the bestest dancers in this whole neighborhood?"

I say, "No, my love," and I purty nigh drops off to sleep. I is so full that I don't pay no 'tention no more 'cept to say yes when she axes me something.

Then she calls Oscar, her big black dog, and say, "Bring the fiddle, Oscar," and I feels sorta funny.

I sets up and takes a good look when Oscar starts to playin' "Turkey in the Straw" on that fiddle and my wife what was goin' to be next day fell to dancin'. She yells, "Whoopee!" and she flings her hands and foots till she plum wore out. She dance till some atter eleben o'clock then she tells me to go to bed, that she got to go out.

I axes her where she goin', but she jes smile and say, "Oh, sommers."

I axes her if she goin' out ever night after I marries

her and she say, "You fool nigger, how you 'spects me to stay home and make any money?"

"Well," I say, "That's all right, honey, I jes wanted to know."

She smiles then and goes on to her room and I goes to bed, but I gits to thinkin'. "Now, how does a pusson make money atter eleben-thirty at night?" I axes myself. "They could steal it, but they wouldn't allus git it. They could kill and rob a trabbler, but they wouldn't allus find one." Then I say to myself, "Atter this night that 'oman goin' to be you wife, bud, and you ought to knowed her business long time ago." I keeps on thinkin', and the mo' I thinks, the mo' I gits worried. Atter while I tells myself that I got to find out tonight or nebber.

I git outta my bed and I cropt out in the hall and peeps into the parlor. She am settin' in a chair a-grinnin' like she tickled to death 'bout something. I notices that the do's all latched and I thinks to myself that mebbe she done 'cided not to go nowhar tonight. All a-sudden she laffs and say, "I's gonna git married tomorrer and then that good-for-nuthin' nigger goin' to git to work."

Lawd, that am a su'prise, but that warn't nothin'. Jes then the clock begin strikin' twelve, and the ole 'oman jumps on the hearth and starts a-dancin'. "Come offen me, I got to git goin'," she say, and 'fore the Lawd, her skin slid offen her like it was a eel's hide turned outside in! Did you ever see a 'oman without her hide on? That am the frightenes' sight, with the red bloody meat a-showin'.

Well, suh, she steps outen the skin and then she picks it up and draps it in the big brown churn in the corner of the room. Then she turn 'round two-three time and she say, "Up and out and off we go whur the cricks and ribers flow." With that she sail up the chimbley and war gone.

There I stood stumped, 'cause I knowed that the ole 'oman was a witch and that's where she bin gittin' the



money she was buyin' that food with. I was glad I had found it out in time 'fore I married her; howmever, I didn't know how I was goin' to keep out of marryin' her, but I thought I'd find out some way to do it.

I thought and thought and atter a long time I thought of somethin' that Granny done told me when I was a lil boy. I forgot it a long time, but it come back strong then. I made hurry to the kitchen and got some salt, some red pepper, and some vinegar, and I come back to the room whur the skin was in the jar. When I started takin' it outen the jar, it yelled, "You lemme 'lone! Lemme 'lone, I tells you!"

That brought Oscar with his tooths all a-showin', but atter I went back to the kitchen and got him a bone he clopt his mouf and I shet him up in the kitchen. I cropt back to the skin and I filled it full of salt, and pepper, and vinegar, and its hollerin' was awful for two-three hours atter I got back in the bed. I wanted to stay awake till the 'oman got back and that skin sure helped me out.

I heerd her comin' in jes 'fore day and I wondered what I was goin' to do. I slipped down the hall and I lissen and I hear her say, "Skinny, Skinny, don't you know me?"

I cropt on down to the do' and peeps, and thar she am puttin' one foot in the skin and takin' it out. She got near 'bout into the skin oncet, but it was so hot she had to come outen there. She kept on talkin' to the skin, but it was cryin' and not payin' no mind to her.

Well, atter a while daylight come and the ole witch had to do somethin'. She hopped 'round and begged the skin to stop burnin' her, and atter she found out it wouldn't she plopped up the chimbley.

I run out in the yard to see what she goin' do next, and as she flew off, I run behind her tryin' to find out what goin' to happen. When she seed me, she stopped up thur in the air twixt the yearth and the sky and she put the cussin'

on me. While she was cussin' and rarin' and pitchin', she turned herself into a black cloud and she was so mad she busted. She drapped thunder, and lightnin', and hail, and rain on my haid, and I run and she come attter me.

I run and run, lookin' for the house, but I never could find it no mo'. The ole witch busted herself wide open and there warn't a piece of her left, but I was right back where I started from. I made up my mind right quick, though, and I lit out and walked on home. I married a smart gal in the neighborhood and I went to work. I warn't goin' to take no chances on gettin' mixed up with 'nother witch sometime, and sence then I's been mighty 'spicious 'bout 'omans what makes their own libin', 'less I knows where they works.

## Jake Sells a Dog

Me and Sam is down in the south field a-choppin' cotton for Cap'n Kimsey when 'long comes this lil white feller, Jake, leadin' a hound dog what's tied on a rope. This Jake is allus a-swappin' something, and I heers Cap'n Kimsey say Jake got sticky fingers. Jake he kina whine-like, when he talk. He is skinny and runty, and he got a big Adam apple in his guzzle what bob up and down when he talk. Seem like I jes look at the Adam apple a-bobbin' up and down when Jake talk, and I can't think of much to say, jes looking at his guzzle a-workin'.

"Good mawnin'," say Jake, and me and Sam say, "Good mawnin'."

"I come to sell you a dog," say Jake, "without a doubt I has, sure as cracklin bread."

This dog ain't much to look at, no suh. He look like his ribs 'bout to punch through his hide. He hold up one laig when he walk, and he hang his head down low to the ground.

"And he's a good dog too," say Jake, "and I garntees, after you has him a while, you wouldn't swap him for no dog in the hull country, you wouldn't, sure as cracklin bread."

"Sut'nly," say I.

"I don't need no dog," say Sam.

"You mean you don't need no ord'nary dog, and you're right," say Jake. "Nobody needs no ord'nary dog, but ever'budy needs a good dog, and this here's the bestest dog you ever see. He sure is, without a doubt, jes as sure as cracklin bread."

"Uh-huh, yas-suh," say I.

"What he good for?" say Sam.





"What he good for? What any good dog good for?" say Jake. "To watch 'round the house at night, to ketch rabbits, 'possums, and other critters. They jes ain't no end of things what a good dog like this can't do, they sure ain't, jes as sure as cracklin bread, they ain't."

"Sure," say I, "uh-huh."

"Why for you wants to sell him?" say Sam.

"I don't truly want to sell him," say Jake, "but I got too many dogs and I got to thin 'em out some, but I sure hates to part with this here 'un, I do. He's far away the bestest dog I ever had or ever see, he sure is, without a doubt, sure as cracklin bread."

"Uh-huh, sut'nly," say I. I knowed they warn't nothin' harder as partin' with a good dog.

"Why for you don't sell one of them t'other dogs?" say Sam.

"I would sell one of t'others," say Jake, "but when I come away from the house t'others warn't nowhere to be found, and seein' as how I was in a hurry, I brung the onliest one what was 'round. Come to think on it, I wisht I hadn't been so fast. Warn't so far back I'd take this'n now and go git one of t'others. Boy, iffen you buy this here dog, you'll have the bestest dog in the hull country, you sure will, without a doubt, jes as sure as cracklin bread."

Jake has quit talkin', but his guzzle is still wigglin'. So I say, "Yas-suh."

"Dog'll eat as much as a hawg and you can't eat no dog," say Sam.

"Some dogs'll eat as much as a hawg," say Jake, "but iffen you give this here dog half a chancet, he'll pervide for hisself. He don't hang 'round no kitchen door, a-waitin' to be fed. In fack, he seldom t'home at mealtime atall. He's out takin' care of number one, he is. Smartest dog I ever knowed. Always a-wantin' to hunt. I couldn't a-brung him today iffen I hadn't roped him. He'd a-been

treein' squirrels and a-runnin' rabbits all over the woods. You can't eat no dog, but you sure can eat what a good dog bring in. They ain't nothin' better'n rabbit hash and possum gravy, they sure ain't, without a doubt, sure as cracklin bread."

I knows that's a fack and I say, "Uh-huh, to be sure."

"How old's you dog?" say Sam.

"Why, he's scarc'ly more than a puppy," say Jake. "Course he's growed up, but he's got a long and useful life ahead of him. He sure has, sure as cracklin bread."

"Yas, suh," say I. "Uh-huh."

"How come his teeth a-missin'?" say Sam.

"Why, that's where he ketched my ole mule by the hind laig," say Jake. "When my ole mule get out and try to run away, this here dog done grab him by the hind laig and hang on till the mule give up. Jes cause he lose a few teeth, don't make this here dog turn loose. No suh, boy, he hang on till that mule quit a-kickin'. He's a rambishus dog, he is, without a doubt, sure as cracklin bread."

"Uh-huh, uh-huh," say I.

"That why he limp?" say Sam. "Thought mebbe how he done been ketched in a steel trap."

"He don't truly limp," say Jake. "That's jes his way of measurin' distance and a-settin' it down in his own mind. You see, they's only three foots in a yard, so he jes puts down three foots and carries t'other one as he goes along. Course he can't tell us'uns, but he know perzackly how many yards it is from the house out here. No suh, boy, he ain't been ketched in no steel trap and he don't suck no eggs, nuther. I garntee he can lie in a hen's-nest all day long and never smell no egg. He sure can, without a doubt, sure as cracklin bread, he can."

"Sure can," say I.

"How 'bout sheep?" say Sam.

"Sheep!" say Jake. "This here dog won't bother no sheep. He can stay in a sheep pasture all day and never even smell a sheep's track, jes as sure as cracklin bread."

"Sut'nly," say I.

"Can he fight?" say Sam.

"Can he fight!" say Jake. "Boy, he's the fight'nest dog I ever see. No dog ain't never been able to whup him yet. No suh, boy, this here's a real sure-nuff dog, without a doubt, sure as cracklin bread."

"Sure is," say I. "Sure is."

"What name yo'all calls him?" say Sam.

"We calls him Telegram, 'cause he's such a fast runner," say Jake. "He allus takes the lead, and they ain't no other dog been able to ketch him yet. This here dog can up and git, without a doubt he can, jes as sure as cracklin bread."

"Yas, suh," say I.

"What you ax for you dog?" say Sam.

"I axes a dollar for him," say Jake, "and I wouldn't take a cent less from my own ma. Iffen he's any good atall, he's worth a dollar. You can't go wrong payin' a dollar for this here dog, sure as cracklin bread, you can't."

Look to me like Jake is right. Any dog what can hang on to a ole mule like that till 'bout half his teeth done jerked out, and measure how far it is back home like this here dog, sut'nly worth a dollar. Leastwise he can feed hisself, I thinks, and won't get nobody in trouble 'bout botherin' sheeps and settin' eggs. But I ain't got a nickel, much less'n a dollar.

"I ain't got a dollar," say Sam.

"Well, how much is you got then?" say Jake. "I can't stay here all day. I'm a bizness man, and my time's vallable, without a doubt it is, sure as cracklin bread."



"I give you fifty cents for you dog," say Sam.

"Well, give it here then and let me git," say Jake. "I don't want to spend the hull day standin' here a-talkin' to yo'all. But it sure is a shame to sell a dog like this here 'un for fifty cents, it sure is, jes as sure as cracklin bread."

Sam, he handed over the half dollar, and Jake puts the rope in his hand, and Jake he walk off a piece, and Jake he say: "Now he's you dog, and I wants to tell you that you got a dog in keepin' with what you done paid for him. And now before I go, lemme give you a few hints on how to manage him. The bestest way to keep him outen the house and offen you bed is to tie him up outside. That's the bestest way to keep him home, too. And you'd better keep him to home iffen you care anything for his life. Iffen I ketch the scoundrel at my house agin I'm goin' to do my damnedness to kill him. Remember that now! And iffen he ever goes to suckin' eggs and killin' sheep agin, jes cut his tail off right behind his ears and I'll garntee he won't never suck no more eggs and kill no more sheep. That's what I was a-goin' to do for him if you hadn't bought him. I sure was, jes as sure as cracklin bread."

Sam say, "Is you sure this here dog belonged to you?"

"Of course I'm sure," say Jake. "He done took up at my house, and his owner refuse to come and git him. Say he warn't worth a damn and for me to git shet of him anyway I wanted to. I was goin' to kill him, jes as sure as cracklin bread, but I thinks mebbe I could sell him to yo'all."

"You ought to gimme back my money," say Sam.

"I ought to give you hell, and let you call it money," say Jake. "In the name of God what do you think I ought to git for traipusing over the country, draggin' that good-for-nothin' scoundrel after me, tellin' all the lies I haf to, tryin' to sell him? You think I ought to do that for nothin'?"

Well, I see that you ain't got no sense atall, and I ain't got no more time to waste on you. So long!"

I say, "Uh-huh, so long!"

This here dog is beginnin' to shiver all over, and wants to lay down.

"Well, I declare," say Sam.

## The Bride and Groom of Pisgah

Yes, that's the Bride and Groom—the Bride and Groom of Pisgah. Every time the north side of the mountain is covered with snow you can see 'em, jes as plain as life. That's her, standing up, with her veil over her shoulders and that's him, kneeling down by her side. Looks like he's a-holding her hand.

I heerd the tale from my granny, and my granny knowed Peggy Higgins, and Peggy Higgins witnessed the marryin' and helped 'em get away from the revenooers what was after 'em.

Jim Stratton was the young feller and Mary Robinson was his gal, and Mary's pappy, ole man Robinson, I reckon was the cause of the hull trouble. Jes because ole man Robinson thought no feller was good enough for Mary is why he went and done what he did.

Jim and his mammy lived over beyond Big Bald, and Mary and her folks lived acrost the ridge on t'other side of Frying Pan Gap. That was long before the gov'ment took over the land and before that rich Vanderbilt feller had it, even. There wasn't no roads over the mountain then, jes a few cartways 'round the slopes for the sawmills, and if you wanted to go over the mountain you had to walk it on the trails.

I reckon Jim and Mary was cut out for each other from the time they was born, but when they was little 'bout the only time they seen each other was once or twicet a year when there was services at the meetinghouse in the cove.

Jim was 'bout seventeen and Mary must a-been 'bout fifteen, my granny said, when Jim began to go over the

ridge to Mary's house. First off he pretended not to notice Mary atall. He'd make out that he come on a chore for his mammy, to borrow some meal, or to ask 'bout wood-chopping, or something like that. Then he got so's he'd ask Mary did she think it would rain tomorrer, or would she like a little rabbit for a pet. If she say she'd like to have the rabbit, that gives Jim a chance to go back to her house.

Pretty soon ole man Robinson figgers out what's going on, and he tells Jim he reckon there ain't no use for him to be hanging 'round his house none. That put the devilment in young Jim, and he'd keep watch to see when ole man Robinson was working at his still, or had set out for Waynesville, and then Jim'd go over the ridge behind Robinson's cabin, and he'd whistle like a bobwhite, and Mary'd slip out, and the two of 'em would walk around, talking.

Mary told Jim it wa'n't no use; her pappy was dead set agin him, and he'd better not try and see her no more. But Jim wa'n't no Stratton for nothing. He was a strapling feller on the lean side, but big boned. He had sharp, black eyes and a good-stout set to his jaw. His pappy'd been kilt by a sheriff when Jim was a little feller, and Jim hated the law, and he hated anybody what got in his way. He was a sure shot with a rifle. Folks reckoned Jim meant what he said when he said it, and they mostly let him alone.

Nobody blamed him none for courting Mary Robinson. My granny said she was the pertest little thing anyone ever seen. She wa'n't very big and she wa'n't little, neither, jes about medium, and she had dark brown hair with long curls, and her eyes was brown, and they had long black lashes what made her skin look whiter'n what it really was. She was a good girl, and smart, and she'd make a good wife for any fine feller.

Jim was jes bound to have her, that's all, and so he'd

slip over the ridge when her ole man was off, and Mary kept telling him he'll have to stay away or her pappy might kill him when he's not looking.

Some folks thought ole man Robinson was sot agin Jim because Jim was running a liquor still in the ivy thicket behind Bull Ridge, but that didn't make no sense, because ole man Robinson was running a still hisself, and 'most ever'body on the fur side of Pisgah was doing the same. Folks had always run liquor stills in the mountains, 'cause its 'bout the only way a feller could use up his corn and get any money for it. Of course the revenooers was always trying to break up the stills. But it seem like they never catch nobody unless he stand right in their way. The revenooers got fifty dollars for every still they took, and they didn't get nothing for catching a blockader, so it was jes sort of understood that a blockader knows when they're coming and he better stay away from the still until they cut it up.

Ole man Robinson didn't have no trouble keeping the other fellers away from Mary. If one of 'em come 'round, he'd run 'em off, but that didn't work with Jim, and it looked like they's bound to be trouble between 'em. They's both hotheaded and wa'n't scairt of the devil even.

That's why, when Jim heard that the revenooers was a-coming to break up his still, he was sartin ole man Robinson had turned the law on him. He went over the ridge behind Robinson's cabin, and whistled his bobwhite call, and after while Mary come back to the edge of the timber. He told Mary the law was going to break up his still and he knowed her pappy had set 'em on him.

"Iffen them revenooers axe up my still, I'm a-fixing to settle with your pappy," Jim said.

Mary begged and pleaded, and told Jim she knowed in her heart that her pappy'd had nothing to do with it. She

begged Jim to marry her, and they could leave out, and go sommers else to live.

"Jim, honey," she said, "it jes don't pay to fight the law and be mad at your neighbors all the time. A person's got to have peace and has got to live right. Please, honey, let's go away before there's trouble."

But Jim wouldn't have it that way. He'd show the law and he'd show her pappy who Jim Stratton was, and he had some settling to do with the revenooers and some other people too.

The law come up to his still on a afternoon, jes before dark. It was about the middle of December and was turning off cold. They made a lot of noise, beating up the mountain, and their dogs barked, so's anybody could hear 'em. Jim was a-hiding behind a big oak tree, and he had his rifle, and he was a-waiting. The revenooers walked right up to the still—seem like they knowed exactly where it was at. They turned in on it with axes. They chopped up the barrels and let all the mash run out in the branch. They smashed up the copper worm, and they chopped into the boiler. Jes as they was fixing to carry the boiler and worm off, so's they could collect their fifty dollars, Jim cut down on one of the revenooers, and sent a rifle ball through the middle of his forehead. Before he could reload, the others had run off ever which ways, leaving the dead man and the bashed-up still behind.

Now Jim knowed he was in for it, and he must work fast. Seems like he hadn't thought ahead none, 'bout what he would do after he had killed the law.

He kept thinking, "I've got to get ole man Robinson and I've got to get Mary." What worried him most was how he could get Mary to go with him iffen he killed her pappy. But he knowed he had to settle with her ole man.

He took off the left-hand trail, and when he got to where Peggy Higgins lived, he called Peggy out, standing a ways

off, behind the meat house. Peggy come to the door and called out, "Who's there?" and Jim answered, "Is anybody in there?" Peggy says she's alone, and Jim steps out and shows himself. He goes in the house with Peggy and tells her what has happened.

Peggy is a ole widder-woman what has lived all to herself as long as anybody can 'member. The neighbors is good to her, helping her out through the winter, and looking after her one way and 'nother. She is a special friend of Jim's mammy, and right off she makes up her mind to help Jim out of his trouble.

"The law will be back here in no time," she told Jim, "and you better take off, jes like you are, without going home even."

Jim won't hear to it; he say he's a-going to settle with ole man Robinson and he's a-going to take Mary off with him. Peggy did all she could to argue with him, and beg him, but Jim said for Peggy to go and fetch Preacher Ball from down in the cove, and he'll come back in two hours and bring Mary with him.

Peggy knew it's no use arguing any more, so she put on her ole cloak, and tied a shawl over her head, and she took off for the cove and Jim took the upper trail to Frying Pan.

The wind has turned and is blowing in from the northwest, and before Jim got to the ridge it has set in snowing purty good. He was wearing his cotton jeans, and a stout shirt, and a ragged jacket, and a ole felt hat. He was carrying his rifle and didn't have no mittens, and his boots wa'n't much. He didn't mind the snow none, and when it begin getting colder he jes blowed on his hands some and kept warm climbing the trail over the ridge.

On the way he kept thinking how he's going to call ole man Robinson out, and whether he ought to give him a chance. He jes can't make up his mind whether to tell

the ole man to come out with his gun. They's a couple inches of snow on the ground when he gets to the place behind the cabin, and he whistles his bobwhite call. Mary must a-been waiting for him, 'cause she come a-running. She didn't have no coat on, jes a jacket, and she hurried up to Jim and said, "Jim, you must go away, and you must hurry and not lose no time. The law's done been here, and pappy went with 'em, and they're going for more men, and they're meaning to take you Jim, dead or alive. There's bad trouble, Jim, and you musn't lose no time."

"Mary, honey," Jim said, quiet and slow like, "in a way I'm sorry your pappy's not here, and in a way I'm glad. You go and get your things and we'll go to Peggy Higgins' house, and Preacher Ball'll be there, and we'll be wedded, you and me, and we'll go sommers and set up and we'll never come back here no more. And I hope your pappy and me don't never cross trails."

Well, Mary ran back in the house and come out in jes a minute with a few little things in her hands, and Jim helped her on with her cloak, and she tied a shawl over her head after they'd done set out on the trail. Her mammy was calling after her to come back, but Mary didn't even answer her mammy. Her little brother follered them up the trail a-ways, to see where they's headed for, and then he turned back.

The snow is over Mary's shoetops agin they get to Peggy Higgins' house, but Peggy hasn't got back yet with the preacher.

"What if the preacher wa'n't to home?" Mary asks.

"He's got to be home, but iffen he ain't we'll be wedded sommers else," Jim says.

But in 'bout an hour the preacher and Peggy come up the trail from down in the road where the preacher'd left his horse and wagon.

The preacher didn't fuss none at Jim; he jes asked did



he have a ring. This set ole Peggy running 'round the cabin, and she pulled a chest from 'nunder her bed, and she got out a ole white dress and a long white veil.

"This here's what I was wedded in," she said "and I'm aiming that Mary shall have it and be wedded in it, same as I was."

And she took a gold ring offen her finger and handed it to Jim, and says, "That'll be your wedding ring, too."

The preacher don't no more than start till they hear a dog barking down the lower trail. Peggy told the preacher to hurry, and he hurried, and pronounced 'em man and wife, and jes then they could hear men shouting. Jim, he run to the back door and looked out, and he run to the front door and looked out. Then he said, "Mary, they're coming up the lower trail, grob your things and let's take out."

Mary grobbed her cloak, and let out a kind of a little sob, and she and Jim run out of the front door, and they got inside the timber before the law come up to the house from behind.

Ole Peggy made out she don't know nothing 'bout Jim and Mary, and the preacher don't tell no lie, but he don't tell no truth neither 'cause he ain't got nothing to say atall, and the law—they was six or eight of 'em with dogs—fuss 'round the place, and look under the bed, and tromp 'round the outside.

It was plumb dark now, and the revenooers called for lanterns so's they can search outside. The snow has been falling harder and the lanterns don't show up no sight of Jim and Mary's tracks, but 'casionally the dogs get a scent, and they let out to barking and beat off into timber, but seems like they lose the scent and come back to the house.

The law messed 'round the place all night, sometimes going off with the dogs, and coming back again. Two of the men set out for the Robinson place, and two of 'em went

back to the cove with the preacher. When daylight come, some of 'em took out on the upper trail what forks out, one fork going to Bull Ridge and tother going to the Rat and on around the north side of Big Pisgah.

Peggy prayed to herself all night, and every time the law set out she was scairt most to death, and every time they come back she was cheered some and hoped Jim and Mary would get away.

By morning the snow was almost hip deep. The revenooers what took the upper trail worked up to the forks, and there they saw marks what looked like Jim and Mary had sat down in the snow. The tracks led off tord Pisgah, but the revenooers knowed they couldn't get through 'cept they shoveled their way up the trail. So they come back to Peggy's, and they drank some hot coffee, and took off tord the road. One of the men was the sheriff.

Before he left he took Peggy off to herself in the kitchen and he said to her: "Peggy, I know what happened, and I know what you done, and I ain't saying nothing. But I'm afeerd Jim and Mary is laying up there sommers around Pisgah. They didn't have a chance. When the snow lifts, we'll have a search."

The snow was on a good spell, and when it thawed down men from all over the mountains and coves hunted up the trails, and where there was cliffs they climbed down and looked below. They hunted off and on all spring, but they didn't find nothing.

Ole man Robinson wa'n't hisself any more. He allus kept trying to get more people to hunt the mountains, and he even got a lawyer to put notices in the city papers, asking did anybody know where his Mary was at. He wa'n't no good to work, and he jes let his still stand and never ran it no more. He moped around like that a few years and then he died off.

Some say those gov'ment forest fellers found some bones up on the north side of Pisgah a few years ago, but I reckon there wa'n't no truth to it. Nobody knows what become of Jim and Mary, but ever'body knows when the snow is on the north side of the mountain you can see the Bride and Groom there, jes as plain as life.

## Woman Trouble

A man may think he has trubbles and worries, but iffen he ain't had no woman trouble he shore don't know what real trouble is.

I don't neber want to look at no woman agin. They's all alike, and they's been bringin' menfolks trouble ever sence the fust one brought trouble to Mister Adam in the Garden of whutever it was. Any man's 'leben kinds of a fool whut pays 'em any mind atall. They's so full of falsifyin' and jugglery that a man don't stand no more chancet with 'em than a rabbit in a hollow log with a flop-eared houn'dog at each end.

A woman was at the bottom of my trouble whut set my haid sidewise on my neck. Iffen it hadn't been for that trick-dealin' Lizbeth Turner my haid would be a-settin' straight, not lookin' over my left shoulder like it is at. And I wouldn't a-lost my job and my religion, all at the same time. Ever sence I had that woman trouble with Lizbeth I's done had nothin' but bad luck and misery.

That Lizbeth is a high-haided, sassy-steppin' gal what has a rollin' swing to her hips when she walks, and a come-to-mama look in her eye for menfolks. When she put on her red dress and roll them big eyes, all the britches wearers from sixteen to sixty done swarm 'round her same as bees 'round a sourwood tree. I done some swarmin' 'round Lizbeth myself, and for a spell I thought I was the King Bee. But that goes to show how triflin' a woman can be, 'cause all the time I's a-runnin' 'round with her and spendin' the three bucks a week I made at the sawmill on her, she is switch-tailin' 'round with a bunch of other niggers behind my back and takin' what money they got. But I didn't find out 'bout that till all the trouble come along.

Then I find out 'tain't me Lizbeth wanted atall, it's my three bucks a week.

Reckon I done been steppin' out with Lizbeth 'bout three-fo' months when Cephus Tilly, a town nigger from Durham, crossed mine and Lizbeth's path. Fust time I sees him I don't like nothin' 'bout him, atall. Big meetin' is goin' on at Mount Zion Church, and me and Lizbeth been goin' ever night.

Now, Lizbeth is one of thesey'r jumpin', shoutin' sisters when the spirit hits her. She is the highest jumpin' and loudest shoutin' wench this side of Je-rus'lum. When she gets all filled up with the spirit and tries to jump high 'nuff to reach the heav'nly land, somebody jes got to hold her down. I's good at holdin' down shoutin' niggers and I been holdin' Lizbeth down all the time till thisy'r Cephus Tilly come 'long.

Fust I sees of that nigger Cephus is at a Sattd'y night meetin'. He is all dressed up like nobody's bizness with town-nigger spread all over him. His white britches has creases like the blade of a razor. He has on a double-breast brown coat what is button up all the way, and he has on a collar 'round his neck what is so stiff and so high that he look like a jackass reachin' up to look over a ten-rail fence. He has on brown-and-white shoes, and sox whut look like a rainbow done gone crazy. And that nigger has fumigated hisse'f with some of that high-power 'fumery what make him smell like a one-hoss funeral. And his hair is all greasy and slick back, like a African sheik, or some-thin'. As I done say, they ain't nothin' 'bout him whut I likes atall.

That Cephus nigger come in the church late for the meet-in'. He make out like he can't find no seat in the rear, and he struts down the middle aisle, like a Dominicker rooster, lookin' this-away, and that-away—jes sizin' up the pullets—that's what he is doin'. He sees Lizbeth, settin'

side of me, and he cracks that big mouf of his'n, and shows 'bout two dozen gold teeth, and I knows sure enough I ain't got no use for him nohow. I sees Lizbeth foller him with her eyes, and I smell ole man trubble comin' on, jes like you can smell green cabbage cookin' in July.

Come Sunday afternoon, we has a picnic on the grounds. Me and Lizbeth is a-settin' on the ground with Lizbeth's basket of rations, gettin' ready for a swell feed, when this Cephus nigger come 'long. He lift his hat to Lizbeth and say, "Has we-all met befo'?" Lizbeth say, "I reckon we's not met, but you is welcome to eat with us."

Lizbeth don't say nothin' to me 'bout invitin' this sweet-smellin' geranyum to eat with us, and he bows some more, and say how he 'preciate bein' invited, him a stranger, and a lot of crap like that, and he sets down and begins pickin' out the drumsticks and eatin' 'em with his gold teeth. He rolls them big frog eyes at Lizbeth, and keeps gurglin' while he's eatin' them drumsticks, 'bout how good they is, and did Lizbeth cook 'em with her own lil hands?

'Fore long, Lizbeth ain't payin' me no mind atall. She jes kinda squirm 'round with her back on me, and she talk and laff with this Cephus nigger. 'Taint no use sayin' I ain't gettin' mad, 'cause I is, and I ain't goin' pull out and leave Lizbeth there with that frogeye in that double-breast brown coat, and I ain't goin' let no town nigger take my woman away from me right under my eyes. Lizbeth is lookin' at that nigger like he's a red-stripe stick of candy and she could eat him up.

When the rations is all gone, I jump up and takes Lizbeth by the arm and lead her into the meetin'house. She keeps sayin' it's too early to go in, but I don't pay her no mind. I take good care to set her on the end of a bench, and I set next to her so no town nigger's goin' set on t'other side. After while that Cephus come in and set down on the end bench, right 'cross the aisle from Lizbeth.

Neither one of 'em pays no mind to whut the preacher done sayin'. Lizbeth keep lookin' over at Cephus, and Cephus he keep crackin' his big mouf and showin' his gold teeth and blue gums. Seem like I so mad I lose all my religion, jes watchin' them two.

When the preacher finish preachin' he call for all the sinners to come up to the mourner bench and be washed clean of they sins in the water of repen'ence. When he done that, I see Lizbeth shoulders start twitchin' and I knows the shoutin' and jumpin' spirit is workin' on her, so I lays my hat on the floor and gets ready to hold her down when she start jumpin' too high.

'Bout now ole Sally Harris, who ain't never been a member of no church, gets up outen her seat and goes up to the front and gives the preacher her hand. When she does that, the shoutin' spirit busted loose in Lizbeth's soul. She jumps up on her feets, claps her hands, and shouts, "Glory, glory, a sinner's done saved and brought into the fold." While she shoutin' I see she keeps watchin' Cephus to see what he goin' do.

She steps out in the aisle, swayin' her body, clappin' her hands, and yellin' praises to the Lawd for bringin' a sinner home, like she allus do when the shoutin' and jumpin' spirit done hit her, and the louder she yell, the higher she jump.

I gets ready to grab her and hold her down when she jump too high like I been a-doin', when I see she got more Cephus on her mind than she got shoutin'. She walk up and down the aisle past Cephus, with her arms lift up, and her haid throwed back, and her body swayin' smooth like wheat bein' blowed by the wind, and ever time she pass Cephus she drop him a come-to-mama look outen her eye, and Cephus he look back at her like he itchin' to reach out and grab her.

'Bout that time the devil is workin' in me hard. I is so mad I clean forget I am in the churchhouse at a meetin'. I

is mad enough to fight all the preachers, and all the deacons in the amen corner, and I knowed if that Cephus nigger so much as bat his eye at me I's goin' to knock him slap through the window—churchhouse or no churchhouse.

Lizbeth stops in front of Cephus and starts jumpin' up and down. She keeps goin' higher, each time reachin' for heaven, till she is jumpin' 'bout four feet. Then I grab her when she lands and hold her down.

'Stead of lettin' me hold her like she been doin' she fit like a wildcat, clawin', and kickin', and yellin', "Go way, Caesar; go way Caesar, I's got sugar and 'lasses in my soul and I wants Mistah Tilly should hold me."

When he hear that, Cephus jumps on his feets and snatches Lizbeth from outen my hands, and stands atween Lizbeth and me. I don't say nothin'. I jes balls up my fist and lets that Durham nigger have it 'side his jaw, and he folds up like a ole hawg shot atween the eyes. I reaches for Lizbeth, but that wildcat grabs her fingernails in my face, and tears the hide off. Then she breaks loose and falls down on the floor, aside that Cephus nigger, and takes his head in her lap, a-cryin' and a-rubbin' his jaw where I done smack him.

The preacher come hot-footin' it down outen the pulpit and grob me by the arm. He tells me I done sinned 'gainst the Lawd by fightin' in the meetin'house, and that my doin's has brung the devil, and the Lawd will sure put his mark on me for sinnin' like I has did.

I tells the preacher that iffen it ain't been for that double-crossin', cheatin', chiselin' Lizbeth Turner, I wan't done no fightin', and she is the one the Lawd ought'a put His mark on. Asides 'twan't no religion makin' her shout, she jes doin' her scand'lous showin' off to ketch Cephus' eye and make him hold her. I stomps outen the meetin'house and leave Lizbeth with that high-collar, sun-brown, gold-teeth



dude from Durham who ain't yet come outen the sleep I done knock him in.

I walk on down the road, tryin' to cool off and forgit whut the preacher say 'bout the Lawd puttin' a mark on me 'cause I fit in the meetin'house. I is walkin' under a chinaberry tree, when all to oncet somethin' hit me—bam—on the side of the haid. Seem like I gits dizzy, and I sees lil balls swimmin' 'round my haid. I never knowed whut done hit me, and I falls to the ground, and purty soon I sees a lil black dog come slidin' outen the tree. I knowed he is a sign sent by the Lawd, and I looks to see whut he goin' do. He come up to me and he say, "Caesar, you is fit you last fight." Then he run 'round me three times and goes and climbs back up in the tree.

My haid is spinnin' 'round, and I don't 'member 'bout no dog I ever knowed climbin' up and down no tree. Seem to me like my haid 'bout to pop off. It keep turnin' faster and faster, same as a top spinnin' on the floor; then all to oncet it stop with a jerk. I lay still a minute, seem like, and when I gets up I knows somethin' is all wrong.

My haid ain't settin' right. 'Stead of settin' on straight, like allus, it's settin' on sidewise, a-lookin' over my left shoulder. I tries to turn it 'round, but 'tain't no use. It won't turn back, and it's been that away ever sence.

I ain't never been able to turn it 'round, and I ain't doin' no more fightin' 'cause I cain't see what my hands is hittin' at in front of me.

Yes, the Lawd shore put His mark on me for fightin' in the meetin'house, but 'twas woman trubble whut make me do whut I done. I don't see why the Lawd made women nohow. They been trubble bringers to menfolks ever sence that woman in the Garden of whutever-it-is, went and fotched in the apple for ole Adam to eat and he shouldn't.

## Uncle Heber's Flytrap

There ain't no question 'bout my ole Uncle Heber being the goldurnest laziest man in these parts, I reckon. Spent his full life trying to hatch up new ways of gitting outen work. Lots of folks 'cused him of shirking his dooties, and when he didn't make no comeback they said he didn't have no shame even, but I reckon the truth is he jes didn't have no energy to make argyment.

He never took no wife 'cause he was too lazy to go court-ing; and doing his own housekeeping like he done, he jes nacherly let his place go to rack and ruin. The shingles of his house all blowed off, and part of the roof caved in. Cracks come in the walls, and it rained in so hard that ever'thing in the house was wet. Uncle Heber stuck it out until the cracks got so big that the wind'd come in and blow the civers offen his bed. He caught cold and almost died 'cause he was too lazy to sneeze, even. At last the house sorta give up and caved in, and then Uncle Heber knowed he's got to move sommers else.

Feller told him 'bout a little island, eight mile up Brice's Crick, what nobody claimed, and Uncle Heber jes moved on up there. Was too lazy to explore it first, jes put his stuff together in a duffel bag, called his dog, and off he set.

The ground on that island was the richest, I reckon, anywhere could be found. No crops had ever been growed on it and it was made up of silt washed up from the crick. Uncle Heber was in the best piece of luck anybody ever heerd of, I reckon. All he had to do was push a stick in the ground, and goldurn if it didn't take root and grow. On the island was enormous trees of all kinds, some of 'em as thick in the trunk as a house. They was apple trees with apples as big as punkins, and persimmon trees with per-

simmons as big as your head and as sour as a old maid schoolteacher's mouth. The catfish in the crick was as big as alligators. Only trouble was that ever'thing else was in perportion. The good things was the bestest, but the bad things was the worstest anybody ever heerd tell of.

Uncle Heber sure was in clover. He found a big holler tree what he makes into a house, and there's plenty of fruit and fish and ever'thing he needs. He had brung along his old clay pipe and some fine-cut backer, and of course when he filled his pipe he spilt some backer and jes let it lay. Well, the backer took roots and grewed up into the biggest and strongest backer leaves anybody ever heerd of.

He figgered out a good way to catch catfish and not tire hisself out. He'd balance his pole on a forked stick, and put a rock on the limb of a tree jes over the shore end of the pole. On the rock he tied a string. Then in the limb of the tree he rigged up a sharp knife atween two tater graters. He'd stretch hisself out on the crick bank, puffing on his pipe and cogerate hisself on how to cut down on his work. When he sees a nibble on the fishline, he pulls the string. The rock falls off on the end of the pole. This jerks the fish outen the water, 'crost the knife what guts it, and through the tater graters what takes off the scales. He didn't bother 'bout the heads and tails, jes cooked the fish thataway and left the rest for his dog.

Uncle Heber'd lost all his teeth when he was a young feller, jes 'cause he was too lazy to chew his food, I reckon, but he got 'round that all right. He traded a man outen a set of store teeth and then rigged up some clockwork to make the teeth champ up and down. Uncle Heber'd wind up the clockwork and put them in his mouth and let his jaw hang loose. Then he'd feed in his rations and the teeth'd chew it up for him. He used to keep the teeth in his hip pocket, but oncet they got started running in his

pocket and bit a hunk outen Uncle Heber, and after that he kept 'em out on the table where he could see 'em.

Oncet he was laying on his back 'longside his fishpole on the crick bank, smoking his pipe and figgering how he was getting tired of catfish and wanted some fresh meat and how he could get some meat without trubble, when a big idee hit him. He 'membered 'bout a little plant he'd seen down near Wilmin'ton what folks call the Venus fly-trap and this plant catches flies and little frogs. He figgered that in his fertile land mebbe one of them flytraps'd grow big enough to trap him some game.

After worrying 'bout it two or three months, he got up enough energy to push his raft acrost the crick, walk to the road, and pick up a ride to Wilmin'ton. He got a Venus plant and took it back to his island and planted it in a clear space.

In no time atall that plant begin to grow, and Uncle Heber see he had figgered proper and correct and the plant is going to be big as a live-oak tree. When the Venus plant was six foot high, it caught a rabbit one night. In the morning Uncle Heber see the jaws of the trap shet tight and a rabbit tail sticking out. He figgered and figgered how to git the rabbit out and fin'ly he hit on it. I be goldurn if he didn't light up his pipe with that strong backer and blow at the Venus trap. The plant got real white and began to shiver and opened up its trap and let the rabbit drop out.

Uncle Heber figgered this was the best luck of all. The Venus plant kept on catching him game, most every night, and in a few months it was big enough to catch a deer or a bear. Uncle Heber had so much game he didn't bother to fish no more, jes eat his fill on game. This went on for quite a spell, and Uncle Heber was sitting purty and the only thing he was worrying 'bout was how to find a easy way to dress his game.

Then late one night he was woke up by a awful yammering going on outside. He got up and crawled outen his holler tree, and it was bright moonlight, and he sees his dog chasing a big skunk 'round the Venus tree. The dog was right behind the skunk, but couldn't quite catch it. All a-sudden the tree reaches out one of its traps and grobs up the skunk and the dog in one gulp.

Now Uncle Heber thunk a lot of his dog. It was his onliest friend, and the only thing he could talk to, and he ruther have 'most anything happen to him 'cept lose his dog. So he runs back to his tree house to fetch his pipe so he can blow smoke on the trap and make it open up.

But I reckon that skunk was too goldurn potent for the Venus trap. When Uncle Heber come up, the Venus tree is shaking all over. It shake back and forth and dip up and down. Big gobs of sticky sap, like 'lasses, come oozing out and run down on the ground. First thing Uncle Heber knowed one of the traps dip down and grob him up entire.

The Venus tree keeps on shaking like it's sick to its stummick. Then it gives a powerful lunge and tore itself up by the roots and landed smack in the middle of the crick.

Iffen it hadn't been that Uncle Heber was smoking his pipe when the trap grobbed him he'd a-been a goner, I reckon. The Venus tree started down stream with him in one trap and the dog and the skunk in 'nother, and he jes puffed up a couple good puffs of that pipe and the Venus tree wilted right down in the water and opened up its traps, wide open. Uncle Heber landed in the water, and the skunk and the dog landed in the water, and the three struck off for shore. Uncle Heber smelt the skunk, and the skunk smelt Uncle Heber, and the skunk jes turned 'round and jumped back in the Venus trap.

Uncle Heber was a changed man after that. He moved to town and got a job in a livery stable, and he give up smoking. Said he couldn't stand that sissy stuff they sold in town and called it backer.

## Animals Has Got More Sense than Men

There was Dick Wilson, and Mills Bright, and Lee Hogan, and Don Saunders, and me, all five of us holed up on the porch of Al Jenkins' store at Turners Corners. It was raining cats and dogs, and nobody had the stummick to git out in it. Dick Wilson's a lean and lennegy feller what always has a twist of hillside navy in his jeans and a good-size hunk of the same in his guzzle. He puts a finger on each side of his mouth and squirts out a stream what carries a good eleven foot and hits the dead center of a puddle under his Model-T truck.

"By the way," says Dick, "I found out 'bout that fox them Morgan boys been losing near the top of Briar Mounting where there's nary hole nor cliff in half a mile."

"Don't say so?" says Lee Hogan. "Gimme chew, somebody."

"I'm a-telling you," says Dick, passing over the navy.

"Go ahead," says Don Saunders, reaching for the twist after Hogan had bit off a mouthful.

"I took that old speckled bitch of mine there 'bout four o'clock yestiddy morning," says Dick, "and put her in the pack with the Morgan dogs. The dogs same as usual jumped the fox and lit out on a straight line for the mounting top in the purtiest race I've heerd in many a day. I fine civilly told them Morgans my bitch'd run that fox in a hole quicker'n hell could singe a feather and she'd be found a-pinting her nose in that hole after him, regardless of wherever that hole was at.

"Just like common, the pack quit when they hit the bald ground below the top and purty soon we meets all

the dogs but my bitch coming back. When we got closer, I can hear the bitch a-crying low and a-whining. 'Boys,' I says, 'she's got him in a hole, just like I said.' You orta heerd them Morgans a-snorting and a-blowing. 'Hole, hell,' says Bill Morgan. 'How come our dogs come back?' I says, 'Just 'cause they ain't no fox dogs, that's what.'

"It was gitting dark; so we lit up some pine sticks and took off for the top. By the time we got up there our lights had burnt out and it was darker'n a stack of black cats, and the bitch had quit whining and we couldn't find her in spite of the devil. The Morgans wanted to clear out for home, but I had some good drinking liquor along and they finally said they'd stick it out with me. When it come daylight I spied the bitch standing out on one of them leaning sourwoods that sticks out over the bluff. I knowed dad-burned well there wasn't no fox in that sourwood, but I clomb up there and saw she was a-pinting her nose down the bluff. I leaned over where I could see the way she was a-looking, and what you reckon I seen?"

"The fox sitting on a cloud," says Lee Hogan. "Gimme 'nother chew."

"Wrong as usual," says Dick, handing over the twist. "You've seen these big poplars what sometimes die high up and gits broke off? Well, there was one of 'em more'n a hundred yards down the bluff. That blasted fox was a-laying up there with his head on his paws, giving that bitch of mine a grin once in a while."

"Don't doubt it a bit," says Mills Bright, who had been whittling on a stick near the door. Mills is fat and dumpy, and his face is red and there is red rings all 'round his eye-lids. I reckon Mills could drink the whole crowd down on corn liquor, 'specially if it's been hepped up with lye and brown sugar.

"That old Lead I had when I lived over in Finney Cove



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was the best fox dog I ever knowed," says Mills. "The Hawkins boys was always losing their fox, just like you said about the Morgans, but this here fox was gitting away just at the edge of the Morris pasture where there wasn't a cockeyed thing but a wire fence.

"One morning 'bout four o'clock the old woman jammed her elbow in my ribs—she's hell for getting up early—and wanted a passel of stove wood cut 'fore breakfast. When I went out in the yard old Lead come prancing 'round the house like as if he had a date to go sommers. 'Bout that time I heerd the Hawkins pack coming acrost Seagle Knob, heading for the pasture. I figgered I could take Lead and git there fust, and so we did. We was resting for a spell, listening to the pack getting closeter and closeter. Blast my skin if here didn't come that fox a-scooting for the fence. Old Lead made a lunge and just missed him, and quick as scat the fox scaled the fence, jumped, and landed a-straddle of a big steer. The steer let out a beller and high-tailed it to'rd the fur end of the pasture, half mile away. Well, 'fore I could hardly see what was going on, Lead jumped the fence and straddled another steer and lit out after the first one like hell beating tanbark.

"'Fore the Hawkins crowd got there my dog was a-heading the fox into the rock cliffs back of my house, and in a hole the varmint went. We clomb up there, and old Lead was a-rolling rocks away from in front of that fox's den bigger'n that corn sheller there. One of the rocks rolled down agin my chimbley and knocked a pot of beans offen the fire. My old woman shore raised hell 'bout that."

Dick looked sorta put out. "Who's got my backer?" he says kinda huffy. Lee Hogan looked like he was asleep on a pile of shucks in the corner, but he cocked one eye half open and pulled the sliver outen his mouth what he'd been picking his teeth with and says: "Did I ever tell you 'bout

that fine bitch my grandpap over on Big Butt Mounting had the time I stayed with him when I was a kid?

"Grandpap'd got him one of them Redbones and crossed her with a Beagle expecting to raise something extra. 'Long in the spring she was heavy with pups. One day she broke outen the pen and jined the pack the Spring Hill crowd had a-running one of them old red she-foxes what cain't never be caught and seldom ran in a hole. Grandpap knowed sure the bitch'd die, so he just cussed some and forgot 'bout her.

"'Bout three months after that me and him was going to the upper field to salt the cattle. Just as we got to the gap of Billy Goat Mounting we heerd the most ongodly noise coming 'round on the north side. It sounded sorta like a dog whining and sorta like a kid fixing to beller. Whilst we was a-trying to figure it out there come a-tumbling outen the ivy bushes, into the trail, the longest, leanest, she-fox I ever did see, and right behind her was Grandpap's bitch, with her mouth wide open, trying to grab the she-fox but not quite gitting to her. They went on down the trail, and by the time we got our sense back here come three little foxes 'bout three months old, scooting down the bank, and three of the bitch's pups right after 'em."

"I'll bet you was crazy 'bout that bitch," Don Saunders put in. "Seems like they's almost human sometimes. I had a dog oncet that I thought a heap of. Something got wrong with him and I sent for the vet up at Asheville. The vet says the dog was daid when he got there, but I thought so much of him I reckon I just couldn't believe it. I told the doc I could soon tell if he was daid. So I got my gun and walked up close and pulled the hammer back, knowing good and well that would rouse him. But he didn't bat an eye. Then I happened to think it was my new gun and I'd never hunted the dog with it. I got the old double-barrel

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and when the hammers clicked that hound opened an eye and slapped his tail agin the ground, twicet. Then I knowed durn well that dog wasn't daid and wasn't going to die.

"Animals is purty smart, all right. I had a little bull oncet over in Madison what I snaked logs with right smart. When we got the log to a steep place where it didn't need no pulling, he'd ease back and sit down on it and ride to the foot of the hill. Then I had a goat oncet what used to hang 'round the depot at Marshall. Do you know that little devil learned the train schedules better'n I knowed 'em? He'd stay 'round the house most of the forenoon, but 'long 'bout noon off he'd trot to the depot, and when the passenger come in he'd hop on the cowcatcher and ride down to Morristown. He'd catch the next eastbound and git back home by feeding time.

"Yes, animals has got plenty of sense. I'd rather have 'em anytime than these autymobiles. I got a autymobile oncet. Drove the blasted thing home and parked it in the backyard close to the cliff what hangs over Marshall. I musta left the ignition on, and during the night the brakes slipped. Next morning that darned thing was sitting in the top of a big white oak at the bottom of the cliff, and the motor and wheels was still running. For all I know, it's running yit. I moved away and left it there. No animal could do anything as crazy as that."

"Your right 'bout that," says Dick Wilson. "Yes, animals has got more sense than men. Leastwise there is some men without no sense atall.

"Me and Ed Blevins was up in the Blacks one fall. We carried a purty good supply of amminition, but you know what that fool Ed done the fust day? Him and me got separated 'bout the middle of the afternoon, and after while I heerd him shooting and shooting off to the west. I worked 'round the ridge and 'bout a hour later I come up on him

loading his gun. 'What's the matter, Ed,' I says, and he says, 'I 'low to kill that squirrel if it takes the last dadburned ball and patching I got.' All the time he keeps his eye on the top limbs of a big chestnut oak.

"Well, I set down there till he used up the last smidgeon of powder he had and then I figgered I'd take a crack at that squirrel myself. But I couldn't see no squirrel. 'Wait a minnet,' he yelled, 'there he is in that little maple.' I looked and still I didn't see no squirrel. 'Bout that time I seen Ed looking kinda crosseyed and then he started looking at all the trees and bushes close by. I begun to get kinda fidgety, 'cause he was acting mighty quare, seems to me.

"You know what was the matter? A louse was a -crawling through his eyelashes, and he thought it was a squirrel up in the tree."

"That was sure hard luck," says Mills Bright. "Wonder if any of you fellers has ever hunted when it was real cold. I mean so cold that you ain't got no feeling. The coldest I ever seen it was winter 'fore last when we was up on Old Baldy coon hunting. Man, was it cold! We set a old chestnut tree afire. It was holler and the fire went up inside and blazed out at the top. Purty soon I seen little red-looking chunks falling 'round on the ground. They was so pecul'ar looking that I picked up a passel and put 'em in my game sack.

"Our dogs'd been beating 'round. After while we seen 'em coming 'round the mounting, but they wasn't making no noise. I notice they is trying to bark, but every time they opens their mouth a sorta blue-looking chunk drops on the ground. I picked some up and put 'em in my sack, too. Didn't have no idee what they was, but I aimed to investigate.

"When I gits home I throwed that sack in the kitchen, and whilst I was a-eating, that sack took fire. Such barking

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as you never heerd commenced coming outen that sack. Then I knowed what them chunks was I had picked up. The red chunks was froze fire and the blue ones was froze dog barks. Froze solid."

Dick Wilson says, "Well, it's done stopped raining. Let's git on our way. Who'n hell's got my backer?"

## Dot-and-Dash Bradshaw

Old man Bradshaw is retired now—went on the list in '39 after forty years continuous service. He had three years as fireman and thirty-seven as a hoghead on passenger. His wife died eight years ago. She was the prettiest thing on the whole line, even after her hair turned white and the wrinkles lined her cheeks and forehead.

There's only a few of us old-timers left—I mean the old railroaders with forty years or more service, and of course none of us are spring chickens any more. This retirement stuff may be all right. Yep, I've got me a garden, and I help the old woman with her flowers, and she puts an apron on me and I dry the dishes and such stuff. Once a year I get a foreign pass, and we traipse around the country, visiting our children and grandchildren. I reckon that's all there is to do. I ought to be satisfied to get off the road and let the younger fellows run the trains, but seems like I'm always awake when Number Fourteen whistles in, and it's a funny feeling a fellow gets, lying there in bed while she rolls in and rolls out again. It worries me when she's late, but maybe I'll get over it after while. I hope so, anyway.

Old man Bradshaw lives with his daughter and her husband. The old man has a pretty good time of it, I reckon, with three grandkids at home, and they are trying to get his mind off the railroad by keeping him on the go all the time. When Bradshaw and I get together, we don't mention the railroad. Kind of a gentlemen's agreement, I reckon. Bradshaw makes up for it though, talking about Julia—that's his dead wife. Never no whining about how he misses her, or anything like that. He just says—"That reminds me of when Julia and me went to the St. Louis

world's fair," or "You remember when Julia set out all them peonies in the back garden"—stuff like that.

There was years when everybody on the line called him "Dot-and-Dash Bradshaw." They don't do it no more, not even them that are still alive and remember when he courted Julia with the whistle of old Ninety-Seven. Of course you couldn't get away with stuff like that on the railroads nowadays, but every hoghead up and down the line was getting so that when they whistled in for Goldsboro they'd play with the whistlecord and blast out dots and dashes with the whistle that spelled "I love you." Some of 'em just cut it down to "Love," and they got to calling the station "Love" amongst themselves. It sure seemed nuts in them days, but as I look back on it now I think it was kinda nice.

Julia's old man was Cal Burke, the station operator at Goldsboro. Bill Bradshaw was born and growed up in the town. He didn't get far in school, and he worked at one job and another, and didn't seem to amount to much. When he was twenty he was carrying messages and between times was hanging around the depot all the time. I reckon Julia was about the prettiest girl that ever lived in Goldsboro. She would bring her old man's lunch down to the station for him, and Bill got to eyeing her. Sometimes she would sit down on the extra chair and listen to them telegraph sounders rattle. I don't know when she got interested, but she got a code book from the office, and began studying it. Sometimes when her old man was outside, hustling baggage and handing out orders, she would try her hand at the key. Her old man didn't know anything about this, but Julia got so she could send little messages up and down the line when the wire wasn't busy. The fellows at the other stations got to kidding Julia over the line, and I reckon she liked it, because she kept getting better sending and receiving.

Bill Bradshaw, like I said, was always hanging around,

but if Julia ever noticed him—he was so gangling and awkward—nobody ever knew it, anyway her old man didn't. Bradshaw was more interested in the trains than he was in telegraphy, but when he saw that Julia was learning, he took to learning it too. He got hold of an old key and a sounder and a couple of batteries—the old-fashioned kind that used blue vitrol and a zinc crowfoot, and a copper element in the bottom—you know the kind they used to have—and he set the stuff up at home and went to practicing.

One day old man Burke came in the office when Julia wasn't looking and he saw her working the wire. Somebody down the line was asking her if she was going to the circus next week, and she was saying she didn't know, and the old man blew up.

"What you doing there?" he wanted to know, and he raved that she would get him fired, monkeying with the instruments that way. After while he cooled down, and I think he was tickled pink to know that she had taught herself to be an operator.

He got to letting her relieve him sometimes, and in just a little while Julia was receiving and sending messages as good as anybody on the line. He wouldn't let her take train orders, but she took most of the Western Union stuff that came to the station, and of course she would turn the messages over to Bill Bradshaw to deliver. That way he got to talking with her, and one day he went to the extra key and sounder on the board and tapped out: "I like you a whole lot, Julia."

Julia didn't answer him, just went on about her business, but after that, whenever Bill and her was alone in the office he would go over to the key and send her messages. Of course she had to break down after while, and sometimes would answer him with dots and dashes.

Bill got to fooling around the trains more and more. If he had a day off, he'd ride down the line and back in the



cab of one of the engines. He'd help out with the greasing, or anything, so long as it was working with the trains. Old man Burke didn't like Bradshaw, and he blessed Julia out for a fare-you-well for even talking to him. It got so unpleasant that Bill stayed away from the office, except to get his messages, and about all the conversation that he and Julia got in was by just looking at each other.

One day they were short a fireman and asked Bill if he wanted to fire the engine on the Weldon run and back. Bill jumped at the chance. They got him on the extra board, and in just a few weeks he was a regular fireman.

While he was firing, whenever he had a little time at a station, he would run in the office and tap a message off to Julia. If her old man wasn't in at the time, Julia would answer him, but when he'd tell her how pretty she was, or how much he liked her, or anything like that, Julia would turn it off by wanting to know if Bill thought it was going to rain, or something like that.

It kept up like that all the time Bill was firing, and then he got a regular run as an engineer, and folks knew that Bill was at last doing something he liked and that he was making good.

I don't know what put it in his crazy head, but after he got set good as an engineer, he began whistling dots and dashes to Julia when his engine was rolling in to the Goldsboro station.

"Julia is pretty," he would toot, and "I like Julia," on the back run. Finally he began tooting dots and dashes that spelled "I love you," and when he got to that he didn't change at all. Every time his train came rolling into Goldsboro he would whistle out, "I love you."

Everybody in Goldsboro and up and down the line was kidding Julia about it, and her old man was crazy mad. He wrote the superintendent and wanted him to fire Bill off the road, but the superintendent said he didn't see why Bill

couldn't whistle anything he wanted to, so long as he whistled at the right time and place.

One day when Bill climbed down from his cab at the Goldsboro station and got his orders from old man Burke, Julia handed him a message on flimsy paper.

"For gosh sake, stop that crazy whistling," the message read.

When Bill came back through Goldsboro he tooted, "I will if you say yes."

Julia said yes, and they were married. They set up their home in Goldsboro, and raised their kids, and Julia was a fine woman. She helped raise most of her grandkids, and she taught Sunday School. My old woman and me were both crazy about her and Bill, and they were our best friends.

Bill had a perfect record for all his service. Never no wreck, and no damage to speak of. He brought 'em in on time if anybody could, and he was a darn good trainman. Of course railroading was different in the old days. The interlocking system and electric signals just about run the trains nowadays, and the most a hoghead can do is to tell his wife that he'll send a "J" or a "K" when he rolls through town so she'll know it's him.

## The Devil's Mudhole

Did you know that the Devil ain't got but one eye, and the way he gets folks to do his bidding is by turning on a potent light in his eye? Well, that's a fact, sure as my name's Uless Shelby. I've had plenty of talk with the Old Nick hisself, and he come nigh ruining me by getting me into sin, just by turning on the light in his eye and looking at me. But me and Aunt Nealy outfiggered him and run him back to his hot place, and I reckon he won't bother me no more. Anyway I hope he won't.

Between the barn and cow pasture on my pappy's farm was a mudhole. It was 'bout four feet acrost, and the funny thing 'bout that mudhole is that it never dried up. No matter how hot it got in the summer, nor how long a dry spell we had, it never dried up. It stayed full of mud in the winter and never friz up like the cricks and ponds. All the whole year it stayed the same, full of thick mud, like bread batter.

The darkies called it the Devil's Mudhole. They used to say that the ole Devil lives down in the mud, and at the bottom of the hole is a tunnel what runs down to hell, and when nobody's 'round the Devil comes out of the hole and goes 'bout tempting folks and spreading his meanness. All the talk just went in one ear and out tother, 'cause I knowed the darkies always talk such stuff and they like to keep themselves worked up and scairt 'bout things they can't see.

I used to walk 'round that mudhole every time I went to the pasture, and I thought it mighty funny that it never dried up, but my pappy said it is fed by springs and that's why it never dries up nor freezes.

First time I seen the Devil I had just turned twenty-one, and me and Martha Mayes was fixing to get married and

set up for ourselves come Christmas, iffen I got a good backer crop and could raise a hundred dollars. Me and Martha had everything planned out. We was going to start house-keeping in the lower cabin, what my pappy was going to give us, and we needed a hundred dollars for a stove and some furniture, and some tools, 'cause we aimed to go on our own.

I was going down to the pasture to bring up the cows, 'bout dark, and when I got to the mudhole I see something queer is happening. I see that the muddy water is boiling and bubbling same as if it was setting over a red-hot fire. I never seen it do nothing like that before, and I stop to look, and I see a lot of steam begin to blow out of the hole. It keeps boiling and steaming faster, and then, all to onct, out hops the Devil.

I knowed it was him right away. He was hairy like a ape, and he had horns like a cow, and hoofs like a cow, too. He wasn't no bigger than a man, but he didn't have no clothes on. He had a tail like a mule, and in his right hand he had a pitchfork, just like the kind we used on the farm. But when I looked at his face, I see his long hook nose, and pointy chin, and I see that he ain't got but one eye, and it's in the middle of his forehead.

When the Devil steps out of that mudhole, he ain't got no mud on him, but he's as dry as a bone. Seems funny, but it didn't scare me none—no more than I'd met up with a cow or critter. I just stood still in my boots and looked him in the eye.

"Uless," he said, "you want to marry Martha, and I don't blame you none. Martha's as sweet as a peach, and as juicy as a ripe tomater. She'd make you a good wife and you don't want to let her get away from you. She'd give you five or six tow-headed younguns, but first you got to get her."

I asks him what he means—first I got to get her. .

"Well," he says, "you got to get a good backer crop, and you got to get a hundred dollars for your backer."

"Sure," I says. "My backer's doing good, and if nothing happens to it I'll get a hundred dollars for it."

"Yeah," he says, "if nothing happens to it. But what if something does happen to it? You know it could dry up, or get worm-et, or get dry-rot."

I says I reckon I'll just have to take my chances.

He says there's no use taking chances. If I'll make a swap with him, he'll see that nothing happens to the backer and I'll get Martha and the younguns and ever'thing.

I don't want to make no truck with the Devil, but just as I'm 'bout to cuss him out, a quare light begins shining out of his eye, and I feel like I'm getting weak and don't care what happens.

Then he says: "It ain't much I'm asking you to do. I'm just asking you to get Deacon Ramsey to take a drink of liquor. If you'll get the deacon to take a drink, I'll do you a good turn with your backer and Martha."

That makes me feel bad. I know Deacon Ramsey used to be a drinker, and I know he swore off six years ago and has led a good Christian life. He's the head deacon of the church, and if he takes one drink I know he's a goner and will backslide into his old ways. So I tells the Devil I won't do it.

The Devil starts that funny light twinkling in his eye again, and argifies with me that if the deacon's any good he'll resist temptation, and if he can't resist a little temptation he's no good nohow. I think I will cuss out the Devil good and strong, but my head feels quare, and I hear my own mouth saying that I'll see what I can do.

There was to be a picnic at the church next Saturday, and us men was to clean up the graveyard after the picnic. I took a pint of corn liquor along to the picnic, and before the baskets was spread out I asked the deacon to walk over

to the graveyard with me. When we got in there, alone, I pulled out my bottle, uncorked it, and took a little swig. Then I held the bottle out to the deacon.

My conscience was feeling bad, but seems like I could see that funny light in the Devil's eye, floating 'round my head. The deacon's eyes flash, and he licks out his tongue, and he swallows hard, but he shoves his hands down in his pockets.

"Six years is a long time to be thirsty, ain't it, Uless?" he said, and he kept his eyes glued on my bottle. I told him it sure was, but I didn't hold out the bottle to him again. The cork was still out, and I suppose the deacon must'a smelt the liquor, 'cause he came up to me and grabbed the bottle out of my hand and started to raise it to his mouth.

Right then I changed my mind, and I jumped up and knocked the bottle out of the deacon's hand, and it fell on a tombstone and busted. After a minute the deacon looked at me. I didn't say nothing and he didn't say nothing, but I knowed he was glad I had busted the bottle. I sure was glad, too.

Next evening when I passed the mudhole, it was boiling and steaming again, and the Devil hops out just as I come up. His eye is sparkling worse than ever, and he is mad as hops. He says that 'cause I didn't carry out my 'greement and give the deacon a drink, he's going to follow me and pester me, day and night.

The Devil did just like he said. Seems like everything went wrong. I cut my foot with the axe, and started to cussing like a sailor. I broke the handle of the spade and got so mad I threw it through the smokehouse winder. I couldn't get the mule to plow right, and I beat and cussed him like everything. I knew I was doing wrong, and if I kept on I'd lose Martha for certain, but I didn't know what to do. I didn't tell my pappy 'bout none of this, 'cause I knew he'd think I was crazy with the heat, or some-

thing, and wouldn't believe me. Finally I made up my mind to talk it over with Martha.

I talked it over with her and she says we must go and see Aunt Nealy, 'cause she knows how to conjure out devils and wicked spirits. That night we went to Aunt Nealy's house on the other side of the ridge. Aunt Nealy listened careful, and kept nodding her head while I talked.

Then she said: "Uless, you know the Devil done tole you what he do 'bout your backer. He say he make the backer grow, or he make it die. They's a charm in backer, iffen you knows how to use it." Then she tells me what to do to break the charm the Devil's done put on me.

I been a backer-chewer since I was a little boy. I chew most of the time, and I'm pretty good at spitting and hitting a mark.

Next evening when I start for the pasture I have a good chew in my mouth. The same thing happens at the mudhole. It boils and steams, and the Devil comes hopping out, getting ready to turn his eye on me. Before he could turn his head I let him have it. I squirted a mouthful of good strong ambeer in his eye.

He let out a terrible howl, something like a wildcat that has got caught in a trap. He drops his pitchfork, and claps both hands to his eye, and he runs and jumps back in the hole. There is a loud sucking sound when he goes down, and some big bubbles pop up through the mud.

I picked up the pitchfork and carried it home, and I've used it for twenty-five year, and it ain't worn out none. Yes, Martha and me got married that Christmas, and we raised six tow-headed younguns. The mudhole dried up, and unless you knew where it was at, you couldn't even find the place.

## Hillbilly Champeen

There's been a heap of champeens what come outen these here hills, sech as wood choppers, liquor drinkers, fiddlers, preachers, well diggers, and hawg callers, but the champeenest of the lot was Coot Ledford. Coot could chaw more terbaccer and spit farther, faster, and more accurate than anybody in this hull country. Before Coot was eighteen year old, he had whupped ever'body in McDowell County, and as far as that goes, ever'body else who come into these parts and spit agin him.

Now I'm here to tell you that being champeen terbaccer chawer of McDowell County is something. Ever man and boy chaws terbaccer and takes pride in the way he can handle his quid. There's hardly a time but what a man has a chaw in his mouth, and lots of fellers I know won't lose time by spitting out their chaws before they go to sleep. Now you take them two Tucker boys—both of 'em never take out their chaw whilst they's eating their vittels. They jes roll the chaw over in one cheek and park it there till they've finished their rations, and then go right ahead.

From the beginning a feller learns to spit clean—no fizzling outen the sides of the mouth or dribbling down on the chin or beard. And its got to hit nice and solid without splattering too much. A feller learns to spit straight, so's he can nail a bug whilst it's a-crawling, or hit the corner of the fireplace from acrost the room. Any shirt-tail boy knows better than to spit level against the wind, and nobody but a sissy keeps a spit-box in the house.

In the valley where Coot was raised there was some good spitters, sech as Dave Hollifield, Zeke Tattersail, and Bud Puckridge, and acrost the ridge they was Jake Yancey, and Ollie Blanton—all of 'em good, reliable chawers and spitters.



When Coot was a baby, he was the squackinest youngun that anybody ever knowed in the valley. Day and night that critter yowled and squalled, and it was about to drive his mammy and pappy woozy. Ole man Ledford—that's Coot's pappy—went and fetched a yarb doctor from Turkey Cove, and they plastered, and dranched, and physiked him on and off for two weeks, but it didn't do airy good like it ought to. Fin'ly the yarb doc spoke up and said, "Less'n yo'all wants me to give him som'thing to throw a fit, I reckon they's nothing I can do." Well, his mammy didn't want nothing give him to throw a fit, so the yarb doc he packed up and went off home.

'Bout sundown ole man Ledford struck off to Briar Mountain, where he had a still house, and he spent the night making a fresh run of pure corn liquor. He didn't put no lye, nor red pepper, nor chicken manure in it, 'cause he was wanting it for tonic medicine. He run it through the still three times, and when the liquor was stout enough to dissolve a piece of fatback the size of your fist in two minutes, it was stout enough.

When he got home a little after breakfast next morning, his wife was fretted down from worrying with little Coot, and she were pure tuckered out. So, ole man Ledford started in to mixing eggnog outen that new liquor of hisn. He mixed a quart with some milk in a crock, and beat it up till it was all frothy-like. Then he sot down by little Coot's crib and started feeding it to him with a spoon. After the first taste little Coot grabbed the spoon and began feeding hisself, and kept it up till all the eggnog was gone. Then that little rascal started in screeching and yowling again, bad as ever.

Ole man Ledford lifted Coot outen his crib and started jouncing him on his knee to see if he couldn't quiet him down a bit. They was a-setting in front of the fire, and it seem like the louder the baby cried the harder ole man

Ledford would stomp his foot. The room got to shaking and a fresh plug of chawing terbaccer fell offen the mante shelf and landed right on little Coot's belly. Coot reached out and took that plug in his hands and clapped it in his mouth. That little codger gave a couple of burps and a sniffle, then shet his eyes and cut down on that plug o terbaccer, jes as happy as all-git-out.

For a spell his pappy was powerful tickled, and jes se there watching Coot cut his teeth on that plug. Coot didn't make airy a whimper, jes lay there a-champing on that terbaccer and burping out the juice.

From that time on little Coot was as perfect a youngun as ever lived. As long as he had a chaw in his mouth, he was as quiet as a hoot owl in the middle of the day. But let anybody try to take it away from him and he'd let out a yowl like all hell breaking loose.

Yes, sir, Coot was a natural-born terbaccer chawer, coming like he did from a long line of terbaccer-chawing ancestors. He growed like a healthy shoat, 'cept he didn't get fat. From the very beginning he took his terbaccer chawing serious, and when he was able to toddle about he'd set for hours at a time in the shade of the big pine tree in the front yard with his back against the trunk, taking pot-shots at ever'thing.

Zeke Tattersail took a liking to Coot and used to take him on coon and bear hunts and taught him all he knowed. Right off Zeke saw that Coot had the making of a champeen spitter, and he helped learn Coot the proper pucker, and develop the mussels of the mouth and tongue so's to get good control and power.

When Coot was twelve year old, he could spit fourteen feet on a level course, and could fetch a fly outen the air three shots outen four. When he was sixteen, he could spit through the mouth of a pint liquor bottle at thirty feet without putting a drop on the outside.

Of course there was a lot of interest in terbaccer chawing and spitting back in them days, and they used to be contests helt all 'round, at picnics, and church sociables, and sech like. A line was drawed off, and all the contestants had to toe the line, and then other lines was drawed, ten, twenty, and thirty feet away, and prizes was give for distance and fancy spitting. In a quick-spitting contest a man started with a empty mouth. At the drop of a hat he reached in his pocket, pulled his plug, started chawing and when he was ready, squirt. The first man to spit across a ten-foot line won.

Them contests wasn't as easy as they sound. It took years of practice, same as cussing or shooting, to get up good speed and accuracy. If a man let some of his chaw slip and foul hisself, he is disqualified. Sometimes a feller gets excited and spits too quick, or agin he gets a passel of wind in his mouth and blows the juice all over tarnation.

At first it was funny to see little Coot a-standing up there against grown men in the contests. But after while the funny part wore off, 'cause Coot began beating ever'body. Then they rules Coot out of all the contests, 'cause it got so if Coot entered nobody else would come in.

Being ruled out didn't stop Coot from improving his tecknick. He took more time to chew for mere pleasure and work on the fine points of spitting. Sometimes if there was a stranger in the crowd, Coot'd take side bets, and I never seen him lose. That is he never lost until that feller come down from Avery County, and that come nigh breaking up all the spitting contests in the valley.

They was having a sheep-dipping at the Widder Plummer's, and a bunch of us fellers went over to help her out, seeing she didn't have no menfolks 'round. When I got there, the fellers was a-standing 'round the dip tank, trying some new drinking liquor ole Dade McFarlin had brung over. They was a feller in the crowd selling a lot of fancy

gadgets, like stickpins, and rings, and truck, and he says he's from Avery County. He was a dude if I ever see one. He had on a striped store-bought suit of clothes, and a pair of yeller shoes, and his hair was all greased down, and he had on a gray felt hat. He was so slick-tongued he could beat you on anything you started to say. But he didn't sell much stuff 'cause the fellers was saving their money to bet on the spitting contest that was coming on.

After the sheep was all dipped, somebody drew a line, and we knowed the contest was ready to start. Of course Coot was ruled out, and he stood 'round and watched the other fellers spit. The widder gave pies and cakes for prizes, but the fellers was betting their money on the winners.

After Zeke Tattersail got most of the prizes for distance, and Jake Yancey won on hitting the target, this stranger feller says to Coot, he says, "You seem to know a lot about fancy spitting; why didn't you enter?"

Somebody told him Coot was ruled out because he was too good, and the stranger asked Coot if he knows anything about speed spitting. Coot says he knows a little about speed but not much, and the feller says, "How about a match on speed between me and you for five bucks?"

Coot didn't want to enter—he allus acted kinda modest—but the rest of us egged him on, and we put up two bucks for Coot and three for ourselves. We was feeling pretty good, 'cause we knowed Coot could beat anybody in the country, and no dude would have a chance with him.

Well, we drew a new scratch line, and a ten-foot line. Coot and the stranger feller toed the line and spit out their chaws, and we examined both their mouths and see they are empty. We was all so excited we could hardly stand still. Grandpappy Halliburton was to drop the hat and be referee.

Grandpappy asks both of 'em is they ready, and they

both say yes, and Grandpappy drops the hat. I never see two hands move so quick. Like a flash, both of 'em went for their hip pocket, out with the plug, and into the mouth. But it seem like that stranger feller only move his jaws twice, then he cut loose and spit over the line. He grin, and look at Coot, but Coot is still chawing and not even ready to spit.

All us fellers starts to holler, "Two out of three—two out of three." But Coot helt up his hand. "Nope," he says, "I been beat fair and square. This feller wins the money." Then Coot turns and walks off.

I ain't never in my life see a feller so sorry-looking. Coot was jes like a whupped rooster with his tail feathers dragging. We broke up and went home, and that stranger feller grin, and brag 'bout whenever we got somebody who we think is good, bring him over to Avery County where they is real terbaccer chawers.

Coot didn't show up any more. I heered he was helping his pappy at the still, and I went up to see him. He shore was pitiful-looking—shrunk down to skin and bones and a hang-dog look in his eye. I tried to cheer him up, but he wouldn't say nothing, and after while he jes walked away from me.

I was worried 'bout Coot, and I was worried 'bout the hull business. Jes didn't seem right to me that that stranger feller could chaw that fast. I couldn't get it offen my mind. Fin'ly I went over to the Widder Plummer's place, and back to where we'd had the spitting contest. I was sitting on a log, thinking, and all at oncet I got a idee. I walked to the line where Coot and the dude had stood, and I walked to the ten-foot line, studying the ground. Then I see a stick what had some huckleberry skins on it. Right where the stranger-feller had spit!

I knowed I had found out the truth. I knowed right away that when that stranger went for his plug he pulled

some huckleberries with it, gave a coupla chaws, and cut loose with the huckleberry juice.

Now we hillbillies has what you might call a code of honor. Anyway, if a feller sells you a dog, you gotta be on your own lookout, and if you get stuck it's all fair. It's all right to sell cut-whiskey to a stranger, but never to home-folks. But nobody cheats at a terbaccer-chawing contest. It jes ain't done atall.

So I calls in the fellers from the valley, and Coot come down, and I explains the whole business to 'em, and shows 'em the stick with the huckleberry skins. A funny look come in Coot's eye, and he says, "Take off your hat and toss it out there by the bushes." I took 'er off, and tossed. While the hat was in the air, Coot pulled his plug, chewed and spit, and hit the hat in the middle of the crown before it landed on the ground. That was jes his way of celebrating. Ever'body gave Coot a big hand, and we voted that he had never lost the champeenship atall.

I didn't see Coot for a few days. Then he come to my house and after chawin' real brisk for ten-fifteen minutes, he say, "I took my hawg-gun and went over to Newland looking for thatair dude. I asked the fellers 'round the courthouse, but nobody knowed him. When I told 'em 'bout that striped store-bought suit, and them yellor shoes, and that gray hat, they say, "Don't nobody like that live in Avery County. We'd run him off. The way that feller was dressed, he musta come from Charlotte."

## Them Science Fellers

That there cabin's been empty ever sence M'riar Pressley went away, and I reckon it allus will be, 'cause they ain't nobody going to live in that place no more, 'cept mebbe we gets another batch of them science fellers down here, what thinks they knows so much and ain't got no common sense atall.

Fact is, the cabin'd been empty ten-twelve years afore the Pressleys moved in, and that was after them science fellers done come and gone and said the story 'bout the hant was all foolishment. But I been living in this neighborhood all my life. I recollect when that cabin was built by Jim Clodfeller for one of his hands. That was long afore the railroad come through. The railroad cut a right-of-way through the timber and passed within fifty-sixty yards of the cabin. 'Twasn't long after the railroad come through that the house got hanted and nobody'd live there.

There wouldn't nothing happen at the cabin till the two-ten freight rolled through afore daybreak. Then, sure as shooting, the door of that cabin swings open. It opens all by itself, whether they's anybody in the house or not. Don't matter whether they's anybody looking or not looking, the door swings open jes as purty as you please when the two-ten rolls through. Some folks thinks the door opens to let the hant in; some say it's to let the hant out. Anyhow it opens up, and it stays open a hour and sometimes five minutes, but it swings back shet agin and don't open till next two-ten time.

Jim Gulley says he knows when they was a feller kilt on the two-ten, and the door opens to let his hant come out and look at the train when it passes. He says if a bunch of fellers give him a lift he'd dig 'round the cabin and under

the floors, and he bet he'll find the body. They don't nobody fancy the idee of digging for no dead man what's got a hant, and folks sorta keep away from the place and walk way 'round it when they're going that way.

One day in the summer, two years ago, a science feller comes here and when he heered 'bout the hanted house and the swinging door he gets all het up. He writes to a friend of his'n, and this other feller comes down here too, and the two of 'em watch one night outside the door. Jes like it allus done, when the two-ten come through a-holler-ing like a big she-bear with the bellyache, the door swings open, easylike.

The next night these two fellers take up watch inside the cabin, and when the two-ten come through the door opens up. Then these fellers went to work. They dig some deep holes 'round the cabin, and they run a line down to the railroad track, and they dig some holes between the cabin and the track. Then they write up a piece for the city paper, telling 'bout the hanted cabin door, and they say they ain't no hant atall, what makes the door open is shak-ings from the train. They say they is a shelf of rock running under the place, and the cabin door is hung so's a little shaking starts it to open and then it swings the rest of the way account of being outa plum. They say there is usually a wind blowing agin the cabin from the north, and the wind shuts the door after it shakes open.

Hank Pressley was looking for a place for his family, and when he hears 'bout there being no hants, he moves his family in the cabin. Some of the scairy ones told him he'd better go easy, but he jes laughs at 'em and moves on in.

Hank had a big, stout wife and seven younguns, but he didn't have much furniture nor truck. They had one bed, and the ole woman and three of the younguns slept on the bed and the rest slept on the floor. First night Hank made



a pallet for hisself in the room where the door was, and afore long he is sound asleep. Torreckly the two-ten whistles through, and the door opens up. Jes then Hank feels something stirring 'round him, and first thing he knowed it was plum on top of him.

Hank grabbed holt of that thing and he fit and thrashed, but it won't let go. He wropped his laigs and arms 'round it, and cussed out them science fellers for liars, and hollered he was being kilt, and for Gawdamighty sakes somebody get a gun and shoot the critter.

Torreckly his wife heered him a-yowling and she come running from the bed, a-grobbing up Hank's shotgun on the way. When she rushed in the room, there was her ole man a-rolling 'round in the dark, a-fighting with a whitey-looking something. She was so scairt she got fainty, but she got a holt on herself and up with the gun. And when she seed the thing a-twixt her and her ole man, she pulled the trigger. The shotgun went off like a charge of dynomite, and the first thing she knowed she was a-flying back'ards agin the wall and bashen the sense clean outen her haid.

It was growing light when she come to and see herself a-laying on the floor in her night close.

"How come me to be here like this?" she yelt, and jes then she got her sense 'bout her and remembered her ole man. When she run acrost the room and got to him, there was Hank laying 'mongst a pile of feathers, dead as a door-nail.

Anyhow that's the story she told when she was took to the county seat to stand trial for the killing of Hank. She said she reckon Hank got the nightmare and was a-fighting that feather piller but she thought it was a sure-nuff hant. There wasn't a one of the jury but what knowed M'riar had kilt her ole man, but the je'ge told 'em that 'cept the State prove malice and intent they couldn't find her guilty. So

the jury come back with a verdict of not guilty, and they turned M'riar loose. She took the younguns and packed off to South Ca'lina, where her brother lives, and we ain't seen nothing of the Pressleys 'round here sence.

## Blood Apples

Come March, it'll be thirty-one year sence they laid away ole Cap'n Henry, and last spring his poor ole dautter, Miss Annabelle, died. They and the Missus and the lil feller what died with dip'thery when he was a teeny codger is all buried in the grove on the slope back of the orchard. The Lawd has been good to me and left me my George, but George he's nigh blind and cain't get 'round much.

The cousins has been tryin' to sell the place sence Miss Annabelle pass away, and I reckon does they sell it me and George'll have to look out for sommers else to live. I bin workin' for the fambly sence I's a lil gal, and when me and George was married we both work on the place. We has our garden back of the cabin and make out real good with our chickens and a hawg or two. Oncet a week I goes into the big house and cleans and dusts. Sometime folks comes and looks at the place, jes like you a-doin', and sometime they pick up apples from the orchard, jes like you done. I ain't never told nobody 'bout them blood apples, but I reckon sence the fambly's all gone 'twont do no harm.

Seem like atter the Missus die, somethin' awful come over Cap'n Henry. Somethin' hard come in his eye, and he never want Miss Annabelle outen his sight. He was sweet and kind to her, 'cept when she wanta go sommers away from home. Then he say, "Annabelle, I hopes you can make your excuses to them people, but I rather you stay to home tonight."

At first, Miss Annabelle she laff at her Pa and joke with him, and she go anyway, but when she get back she find he's a-waitin' for her with the lamp a-burnin'. Then he mope 'round for a week atter'ards, and seem like ever' time she go out, he gets worser and worser. Fin'ly Miss

Annabelle she get so she har'ly ever go away from home, and that make her Pa so happy, seem like make her happy too.

Miss Annabelle she gets prettier and prettier every day. When she twenty year ole, she the prettiest thing I ever seed in my borned days. She had real light blonde hair like her Ma, only lighter and finer. When the sun come in the winder and strike her hair, seem like it have silver fire all 'round it. Her skin were so white and soft, jes like satin, and her cheeks had nice pink unnerneath. She were so sweet and kind to her Pa, and me, and George, seem like she a angel. Her Pa never say much to her, but I see him allus a-lookin' at her with that funny look in his eye, what I don't like atall.

George and me, we talk 'bout it, and George say, "Well, honey, the gal jes so much like her Ma, ole Cap'n Henry crazy 'bout her."

But I say, "Man ouden be so crazy 'bout his own dautter—she got her own life to live."

Well, things goes on like that long time, and I reckon it a year that Miss Annabelle har'ly left the house, 'cept mebbe to go to town to buy things. Most times her Pa drive her to town, but sometime he let George take her.

When George take her, Cap'n Henry allus say to George, "Now look h'yar, George, you look atter Miss Annabelle good, and you see that you bring her back safe and sound afore dark."

Cap'n Henry he allus waitin' when George and Miss Annabelle come back, but he never say much to her.

Come Chris'mas, one of Miss Annabelle's girl friends in town gonna give a big house party. That was Miss Sally Whitaker, and Miss Sally come to the house and beg Miss Annabelle to come.

I overheard them a-talkin', and Miss Sally, she say, "You'll be pow'ful glad, iffen you come, 'cause they's a fine

young gen'lemum from Maryland, what'll be there." Seem like his name's Mister David, and he's here gettin' somethin' he's writin' for his college. Sound silly to me, but anyhow they's a Mister David what's comin'.

Cap'n Henry he look quare when Miss Annabelle tell him she goin' to the party and be gone three days. He didn't say much, he jes look at Miss Annabelle a while and say, "Very well, my dear, I knows you'll have a won'erful good time."

Miss Annabelle she all a-flutter 'bout gettin' ready, and gettin' new close, and ribbons, and bonnets, and slippers, and things. Seem like she can har'ly wait for the time to come. One day afore the party, Cap'n Henry he come to me and he say, "Aunt Laura, I wants you should go 'long with Miss Annabelle and look atter her while she at the party. She'll need someone to take care of her, and I wants as you should do it."

I tells Miss Annabelle that I's goin' with her, and she think that jes fine. I help the dressmaker get the close ready and when time come, George take the surry and piles in Miss Annabelle's trunk and bag, and my ole bag, and drives us to town and to Miss Sally's house.

They's a whole passel of young folks what runs down to the carriage block to meet Miss Annabelle, and they all laffin' and talkin' at the same time. Miss Sally's ma, she give Miss Annabelle a room upstairs, and she give me a room in the cabin behind the house. Course I must look atter Miss Annabelle, and help her unpack, and dress, and sech, and seem like they's so much changin' all the time, I's in Miss Annabelle's room or in the big house most all the time.

Miss Annabelle, she the prettiest gal in the whole passel, and the young fellers all crowd 'round her and want her to go ridin' with 'em, or go drivin' with 'em, or boatin' on the ribber, and they all want her to dance with 'em at night.

I reckon Miss Sally knowed what'ud happen, 'cause seem like Miss Annabelle and that Mister David jes made up from the start. I don't know how Miss Annabelle give the others the slip, but afore long, she and Mister David, they goin' ever'wheres together. They walked, and they rode the hosses, and they danced and had sillibub, and they'd get off in the lib'ary and dance by theyselves.

I begin to get terrible worried, 'cause I don't know what Cap'n Henry do 'bout all this. I speaks to Miss Annabelle, I say, "Miss Annabelle, you reckon you ou'ta be goin' off with this feller like you a-doin'?" but Miss Annabelle she laff and say, "Aunt Laura, you a dear, but don't you worry, I'm havin' the bestest time of my life."

And she sure were. I never seed a body so happy in my borned days. Well, that's the way it went the three hull days, and when we sets out for home, this Mister David he ride his hoss 'longside the surry for 'bout a mile, talkin' to Miss Annabelle and tellin' her he's a-goin' to call very next day.

Sure nuff, next atternoon, there he be a-standin' on the piazzzi, with his hat off, and when I opens the door he walks right in and hands me his hat, and gloves, and crop. He say he like to speak to Cap'n Henry, and when the Cap'n come in, this young feller he walk right up to the Cap'n, and he hold out his hand, and he say, "Cap'n Henry, I's David Thornton, and I'd be pleased for permission to call on your dautter."

Cap'n Henry he didn't say nothin' for a long time; he jes stand and look at that Mister David. Then he say he be honored to have the young gen'lemum call on his dautter.

Well, that Mister David he call that night, and he call ever night for four nights runnin'. Miss Annabelle she in a-flutter all the time, and she say to me, Mister David this and Mister David that, and Mister David he say this and he say that.

Then they was the last night Mister David call. Miss Annabelle walk to the gate with him, 'bout 'leben o'clock. I hadn't seed Cap'n Henry all evenin', but he never was 'round while Mister David call. I puts Miss Annabelle to bed, and I see she a-cryin'.

"What's the matter, honey?" say I.

She only say, "Oh, nothin', nothin' atall."

George and me, we talks late in the night, and 'bout two o'clock we see a light in Cap'n Henry's room. I don't 'member when I seed a light in his room so late, and me and George we talk some more 'bout the goin's-on.

Mister David didn't come no more. Nobody seed him agin. In a couple days Miss Sally she come to the house and ask did we see Mister David, but nobody had seed him. Miss Sally say, that funny, 'cause nobody know he goin' to leave town.

Couple weeks later, a man come to the house with the sheriff. Say he Mister David's pa, and they tryin' to trace Mister David. They call Miss Annabelle in and they have a long talk.

I heerd Miss Annabelle say, "He ask me to marry him, and I tell him I cain't, and he wants to know why not, and I tell him they's a reason but I cain't tell him the reason, and Mister David say he goin' away."

Mister David's pa and the sheriff went off, and the house clam up like the grave. Don't nobody say nothin' to nobody, only Miss Annabelle she allus a-cryin' and a-sobbin'. Cap'n Henry he har'ly ever come in the house, 'cept to eat and sleep, but I seed him lookin' to'rd the orchard ever day. Sometime he look out the side winder, sometime he look from the piazzzi, sometime from the back porch. One day he standin' back there and he jes drop down. When we seed him and ran to help lift him up, he moan and say, "Tain't no use; jes lay me down." He were dead in no time atall.

Poor ole Miss Annabelle. She jes watch for the mail deliv'ry ever mornin' at 'leben o'clock. No matter what she doin' she watch to see does the mailman stop and is there a letter she run down to get it and then she cry.

Next fall, when we was gatherin' apples from the orchard, I notice there is a place under the yeller apple tree where the ground is soft, and I asks George did he bury somethin' under the tree. George he say no, nobody bury nothin' under the tree. I take some of the yeller apples to the house to make a pie and was a-pealin' some when I notices somethin' peculiar 'bout them yeller apples. The yeller meats is all speckled with red spots, jes like lil spots of blood. I throwed 'em all out. I wouldn't touch one of 'em for all the money in the world.

Ever year them yeller apples has red spots in 'em. Man what looked at the place oncet say they's blood apples. I don't know, only I wants George to chop the tree down, but he say he won't go near it.

I reckon Miss Annabelle kept goin' down for the mail four-five years. Then she would send me. Poor lil thing she got ole and never go nowheres atall, and last spring she took a bad cold and wouldn't do nothin' for it until she got terrible pains in her chest. The doctor come and he shake his haid, and in a couple days Miss Annabelle die. You can see the graves from the back winder, on the slope behind the orchard.



## Thankful for Blessings

Yes'm, Miss Essie was allus pow'ful funny-minded, from jes a chile on up. They was sure 'nuff folks, but warn't never laffin', or fun in the fambly, not even when it come Chris'mus time. I done cook for the fambly sence Miss Essie born and live right here in this cabin with Bucket—he's my man.

I recolleck when Miss Essie was only 'bout seven year ole, and she come to the kitchin whils I was a-baking pies, and she say, "Granny, I wonder is you thankful for all the blessin's you is got?" There she was, poor lil biddy, a-standin' in the door, and had them gold glasses on even then, and her not eight yet.

Jes seem like her warn't purty one bit. Her eyes was so pale and waterfied, her legs was skinny like a starved sparrer's, her mouth has a sort of grin that went with the rest of her, which was kinda funny-like.

I begin to make talk with her, and she done stop me. She seen the pies I's a-makin', and she say, "Go on, Gran, and finish you task."

Miss Essie was the onliest chick her ma and pa had. They petted her all the time and give her heaps of things, but seem like her growed more skinnier and watereyed ever day. They sent her away to the female 'cademy, and she come home ever summer, and when she gradumate she come home to stay. When she growed up, there was nary a beau that showed up atall. They give her parties in the big house, and they give her parties in town, but it didn't do no good 'bout gettin' her a beau-fr'end. I keepped on cookin' there and seen how things was a-wearin' away from the poor puny gal.

When she was twenty-eight, her pa and ma both died

in 'bout six months of t'other. It was lonesome and sad for her, and she sent a letter away to a ole maid aunt in Tennessee, and she come to stay with Miss Essie, and they settled down to live together.

I kepted on workin' for them two dried-up souls. They was good to me the best they knowed, but warn't nothin' warm-hearted 'bout neither of them poor things. They was allus tellin' me to finish my task and to be sure to thank God for all my blessin's. Miss Essie couldn't stand for a body to have a mind of their own. She sho was a bossified woman if ever there was one.

But she loved her home a heap. That's one thing you have to say for her. She jes couldn't stand to spend one night away from home. When her and her aunt was a-fixin' to go to Pittsboro, 'twas, "Us'll be back in a few hours, Granny. See you does you work well. God is a-watchin' you if us ain't."

When time come Miss Essie was 'bout fifty, I reckon she was, her prizest joy was two dozen hens. Them fowls took ribbons at shows as far as two counties 'round, and Lawdy, chile, them ole hens was gettin' stuck-uppish. That skinny ole soul fed them pets of hern as keerful as most folks would a new-born chile. Thunder, hail, ner high water kepted them from gettin' their rations on time.

Well, one night, 'twere stormy jes like 'tis outside right now. But this was in July, I 'members. Fire and rumbles was sure beatin' through the Savior's skies. And then come hen-feedin' time, and I say, "Miss Essie, baby, you'd sure best stay in where it's dry. Them birds can wait for their feed till the rain stops a-pourin'." But Lawdy, chile, a body might as well a-spoke to this here stone chimbley for all what she listened.

"Leave me go, Gran," she say, and she goes out. Rain and wind was a kickin' up for a fare-you-well. Ole granny seen it all from the winder. Miss Essie went out a-titterin' on

her toes, a-slippin', and a-slidin', and a-ketchin' herself to keep from fallin'.

Honey, she had jes begin to feed them spoiledfied hens, when Lawdy-mercy! a round ball of fire come like a chariot from Hebben. Miss Essie had her big black umbrel up and a-tryin' to keep her haid under it best she can. Lawdy, chile, when the flash come it seem like bright sparks lit on the steel p'int of the poor thing's umbrel and whirled her 'round 'bout three times, and then stretched her thin bones stiff on the cold wet ground. She's done struck daid afore a body could ketch their breaf. I run out to her and I beg most turrible hard for her to talk to me, but 'twarn't no use, she was already at God's throne afore I done come up to her.

Miss Essie's fun'ral was awful sad, it sho was. They was sweet-smellin' flowers, and all. What gave me more worry than her bein' gone was the feelin' that she warn't truly gone. A few days after the buryin' the ole aunt packed up and went to her brother in Tennessee. Chile, I kepted on wonderin', is her soul took flight for good or is it ain't! I study and study 'bout it and I kepted the vittels in the house and the house a-goin' same as ever.

Well, one night I'd laid out me and Bucket's supper on the table—Lawdy, chile, that's way back yonder afore you was borned—as I say 'twas a-gettin' late. I was a-settin' with only my stick afore the red ashes, a-singin' to myself for comfort.

Then, after while, this here door swing open, and Bucket come through it. "Hey, Mam," he say, "I's done ketched the biggest possum in the world." Sure 'nuff, what he say is the God's bright truth. That possum was jes a whopper.

'Twas the biggest possum I ever seen. Its eyes was shiny as stars and its mouf was a-hangin' open, and its tail was slick and long as a body's arm. Bucket and me built us a

good pen out in back to keep in it and fatten it up for Thanksgivin'.

Well, late one evenin' I's out in the yard a-gettin' ready to feed the hogs, I give a look to see how is the possum and is it well and pert. I leaned over and peered through the bars and I seen the critter a-settin' there a-grinnin'. It come over me right sudden that it sho favored Miss Essie, and 'specially the way the mouf drewed up.

"Hey, Miss Essie!" I say, not meanin' no harm, and then feelin' kinda foolish-like.

"I is Miss Essie, Granny, and I wants to get shet of this here pen and see to my hens, I tells you," the possum say.

Lawdy-mercy, chile, when that thing answer me, I fell over myself and beat tracks back to the house. I ain't fancy feedin' no hogs agin that day, and I couldn't hardly wait for Bucket. When Bucket come, I told him 'bout Miss Essie back in the pen. He started to poke fun, but I seen he was sho 'nuff upset hisself, and he listen careful.

"Howcome," Bucket say, "iffen it is ole Miss Essie or if it ain't Miss Essie, I ain't gwine let it out. Iffen Miss Essie done take the form of a possum and get ketched, well that her lookout, and asides, I ain't never heerd 'bout no sech thing."

I didn't argy no more, but jes the same that white lady a-settin' there in that pen give me the creeps, and after that I made 'rangements for Bucket to 'tend to the feedin' when he done his huntin'. Bucket never took to Miss Essie none, nohow, and it sorta tickle him to have her in sech a fix, and he tease her and say, "How does you want you greens tonight, Miss Essie?" Me, though, I ain't think it funny to leave no white lady in a fix like that and a-beggin' to get out.

Then it come 'bout Thanksgivin' time, jes two more days, and Bucket look at me and say, "In jes two more mornin's we's gwine cook that possum."

"Bucket, honey," I say, "I ain't never gwine bring myself to eat a piece of Miss Essie."

"Quit you fool talk, woman," Bucket say, and he gets the pan ready. "I's hongry right now, and us won't wait 'nother hour to roast that pesky thing. Iffen this un don't last 'till Thanksgivin' I'll ketch 'nother un."

'G'inst my best jedgment and a heavy spot in my soul, I sot the pan over the embers. When Bucket come in with the critter all nekked and skint, I turn my haid so's not to face Miss Essie. I'd a-seen her nekked as a chile, but I ain't fancy seein' her nekked as no possum, and asides, I jes ain't got no heart to face her atall. I felt awful sinful, I did.

Us roasted her whole and entire and put her on a platter in the middle of the table. I must say it was sho fine-smellin' meat, and us had 'taters and corn pone, and hot coffee, and even iffen it was a spell short of 'Thanksgivin' it was a grand dinner, 'cept for Miss Essie.

Yes, chile, there was Miss Essie—I mean the possum—there on the platter. Bucket took up the knife to cut him a bounciful slice.

I was jes sniffin' over the sallet when that there possum mouf open in a wide grin, and it say: "Is you thankful for you blessin's this here 'Thanksgivin' season, I wonders?"

"Lawdy-mercy, Miss Essie! Lawdy-mercy," I hollers, and somehow I was outen the door and a-headin' for Parson Perdie's.

Some of the time I was ahead of Bucket and some of the time he was ahead of me, but 'twarn't offen he was. Me and Bucket was a-sailin' over briars, and creeks, and ever'-thin' that got in our way.

When us gets to Parson Perdie's and gets our breaif, and tells the parson what happen, Brother Perdie say me and Bucket ain't been thankful for us'ns blessin's, and we ain't given a tithe to the Lawd, and the debbil jes put the

voice in that cooked critter to rebuke us for our sins of omishun and transmishun.

We done stayed with the Parson and his missus that night, and next mornin' when we went home I let Bucket go through the door first. Seem like my feet sorta dragged behind me when come time to walk through that door.

Honey, that platter was bare entire. The possum lady had done gone away without her hair. Us searched keerful ever'where, but never seen her agin.

I dislikes to differ with Parson Perdie's 'pinion, but I does, and I'll believe till ole Gabriel blows his horn 'twas Miss Essie. Her jes ain't finished her nacheral tasks here below, but why she shoulda come to worry me 'bout bein' thankful for blessin's is more'n I can understand.

Next time Bucket went huntin' he come back with three squirrels and ain't never ketched no possum sence. I cooked the squirrels up good, with gravy, and turnip sallet, and corn pone. When we set down, I say to Bucket, "Bucket, praise God afore us eats, and see that us says grace good and long and proper and tell the Lawd us sho does 'preciate all us'ns blessin's."

## Magic Horse Tracks

This fellow Elliott, never did hear his first name, was a wicked man. Cuss—they say he brought cussing to this country. I've heard many a tale 'bout him and his wickedness and how he finally went to hell. And went to hell he did, and if you don't believe it, go down to Ed Cutlar's farm in Beaufort County and see for yourself.

The proof's there, deep in the earth. Folks call 'em the magic horse tracks. When we were kids and on our way to school, we'd fill them hoofprints with dirt, and when we'd come back that evening, them prints'd be fresh as ever. Pa used to say the same thing happened when him and his brothers filled 'em, and I'll bet a pretty the younguns around there now are still filling 'em up and coming back to find 'em empty. They tell me the Cutlars once turned loose their hogs into the lot and they made a wallow where the holes are, but the tracks were still plain to see.

Here's what happened, the way I heard it. It must've been a hundred year ago; more than that, 'cause Somerset was built not long after the Revolution. Well, it must've been some little time after the Revolution, too, 'cause Josiah Collins, who built Somerset, was a Englishman, and I reckon it wouldn't a-been too healthy for him down in that section right after the war. Anyhow, he built Somerset, and if you've never seen it you ought to. Sits on the edge of Lake Phelps, old house with long, wide porches, winders running from floor to ceiling, a cooling room upstairs where they used to keep dead bodies awaiting burial, and the biggest plantation barn I ever saw, four stories high and still standing. The Government's got ten thousand acres down there now they call Scuppernong Farms, and I hear they're using the old place for the boss man's house; but

the Government ain't got nothing to what old Collins had. Twenty-five thousand acres of land and his own race track, and many a race and tournament he held there. Had fine, fast horses down in that country then, fast horses and pretty women. And Somerset was where the fastest and the prettiest used to come together.

This fellow Elliott, who went to hell, had about the fastest horse in Beaufort County and he won many a race on old Collins' race track. It was forty-fifty miles up to Somerset from where he lived, but that wasn't nothing to them young bucks with their good horses. They used to go up and stay for days at the tournaments. From what I've heard of it, I'd like to have seen one of 'em. Used to bring the queen up the lake on a barge that was decorated like a Christmas tree. Then Elliott and the other young bucks'd go against each other on horseback with armor and lances like they did in the old days, and they'd shoot bows and arrows and fight with swords. Once old Collins let a bunch of 'em with spears turn in on about fifty wild boars he'd had rounded up from the swamps, and one fellow got throwed from his horse, and 'fore anybody could even raise a hand them boars had him tore to pieces. They was a reckless, wild crowd for certain; they'll never see their like in that country again.

Well, it seems one day word got down to Bath town, where Elliott lived, that Collins was holding a big race and tournament at Somerset and a lot of fine folks was invited. Elliott, of course, was invited too. Whoever won the main race could name his sweetheart as queen of the tournament and get to crown her. "I crown thee Queen of Love and Beauty" was the way they used to say it. You wouldn't believe it the way grown men back then would carry on just to get to say that to some little gal. But from then on that was all the talk was about, who was going to win the race and who was going to be queen.



Elliott had a mighty good little stallion, black as the ace of spades and as mean a piece of horseflesh as ever was dropped in that country; almost as bad as Elliott was himself. Everybody was certain Elliott and his horse Devil, that's what he called him and a good name, too, would win that race. And Elliott knew a little gal he was sure hankering to put on that queen's throne. About the only person who believed otherwise was Elliott's best friend, a rounder named Northcross, though I've heard him called Northup and just plain North, too. Northcross, or whatever his name was, was courting heavy himself and he'd made up his mind that his gal was to be the one who was going to sit in the queen's seat. So one day he disappeared and was gone about a week, and when he come back he was riding one of the prettiest horses anybody around there had ever seen, a chestnut gelding about sixteen hands high, and fast—they say it could leave its own shadow.

Well, that busted up the friendship between Elliott and Northcross. After he seen that gelding, Elliott got worried that his little Devil wasn't gonna stand up to it on Collins' race track. But he started talking around and guying Northcross about all the money he'd wasted on the gelding 'cause Devil was gonna run the big horse's legs off. Of course that riled Northcross, and he came right back at Elliott, and the way the two carried on you'd a-thought there wasn't any other horses in the race. Which was about right, I guess, 'cause those were the two fastest horses anybody around there ever saw.

You know how people can get steamed up over something like that; it got so there wasn't nothing else anybody in Beaufort County—except maybe some of the church folks who didn't believe in horse racing nohow—talked about. Course, everybody from down that way couldn't go to Somerset for the race, so there got to be a lot of talk about holding a race between the two horses before the tourna-

ment, which was still a couple weeks off. Elliott let on that he was willing but that Northcross was scared. Then they met up with each other in Bath town one Saturday night, both drunk, and had some words and almost had a fight, and after a lot of talking and cussing they agreed that they'd meet the next morning, which was Sunday, and race a mile and a quarter, the loser to stay home and not go to the tournament.

News of that got around; there was plenty folks in Bath town who didn't like such carryings-on and on the Lord's Day, too, but it didn't make no never-mind to Elliott or to Northcross, who was just about as wicked as Elliott was. When the time for the race came around, there was plenty of their buddies on hand. And they say there was a lot of good church people who got a little too sick to go to church that morning and who just happened to be going by where the race was to be about the time it was to be.

There used to be a lane running down there through where Ed Cutlar's farm is, and the young bloods'd meet there and hang up a new saddle at one end as a prize, and race for it. That Sunday morning there wasn't nothing hanging at the finish line, but everybody figured it was going to be the hottest race the old lane had ever seen.

Well, Elliott wasn't no fool. He knew that his little Devil was fast, but he had a pretty good idea the gelding was faster. And he hadn't been as drunk as it mighta seemed like. He'd bedeviled Northcross into the race because he had a scheme. That night he took a spade and slipped down to the lane. He hunted till he found a soft spot and then loosened the dirt so it wasn't much solider than marsh land, and then he smoothed the top over again so nobody could tell it'd been fooled with. He had some of his buddies along and he fixed it with 'em that if Northcross was leading when they got along there, they were to get out on the lane so Northcross would have to take to

the soft side and then they'd jump back and let Devil by on the hard side.

So when the time come around there they was, both sure they was going to win, and a lot of betting going on, 'specially by Elliott's friends who knew what was up. They lined up at the starting line, somebody shot off a pistol, and away they went. Elliott was leaning down on Devil's neck, and they was really moving. But Northcross whipped his gelding right alongside, and after a little he began pulling away and everybody hollering; even the church folks who was too sick to be in church and just happened to be passing by was hollering, too. They come down the lane their hoofs sounding, so they say, like a fast drum, and the gelding in the lead.

When they got near the place Elliott had spaded, Northcross was a length ahead. So Elliott threw up his hand, which was the signal, and his buddies moved out on the lane like they didn't know what they was doing in all the excitement and just wanted to see the horses coming. Northcross had to swerve over to get by, and when he did, the gelding hit that soft spot and down went him and his horse. Elliott's friends jumped back as quick as they could, but Devil was so close behind the gelding that they couldn't clear their side of the lane in time and Devil had to take the spaded side. Elliott knew how much he'd spaded and he knew he had to clear the gelding, so he lifted the little stallion right over the whole mess, hollering—so every man who was there swore later—"Devil, you'll take me to Somerset or you'll take me to hell!"

Well, Devil took the jump, going off to one side to dodge the gelding and landing on soft ground. Devil tripped up and then he took a sidewise jump toward a clump of trees and off went Elliott head first toward the trees. When they picked Elliott up, his neck was busted. So was the geld-

ing's. Northcross wasn't hurt bad, but he never got to Somerset, not for that tournament.

Nobody ever saw Devil again; he just took off through the woods and kept galloping—right on down to join his rider in hell, they say. But them eight hoofprints of his last two jumps are still there, clear as ever, in the earth. And the stump of the very tree that Elliott landed against is still there too, though it's rotting away. Don't know how they ever settled the bets on that race 'cause neither horse crossed the finish line. Never heard tell who got crowned queen of the tournament. But I did hear that never before or since was there as many people in church in Bath town as that next Sunday.

## Cinduh Seed in You Pocket

Once there was a lil boy and he had some dogs.

How many dogs? You jes wait and count 'em.

And the lil boy's mama put some cinduh seed in his pocket.

Cinduh seed? Why, they was jes cinduh seed. They grow on top of the cinduh sallet in the garden jes like musted and turnip sallet.

And the lil boy's mama put some of the cinduh seed in his pocket and tole him if he got into trouble, to th'ow the cinduh seed outen his pocket, and that'll git him out of the trouble.

And the lil boy went on 'bout his business and clean forgot the cinduh seed in his pocket.

And not long after that, the lil boy went way off from home in a country where they didn't like him, and some men tuck out after him to git him. They runned after him a long way till he come to a tree, and he climb the tree, and he kept on going up higher and higher.

Then the men went and fetched axes and began to chop the tree down, and the lil boy he got nearly scairt to deff when he seed the chips a-flyin'.

All to oncet he recollek what his mama tole him 'bout the cinduh seed. And he felt in his pocket, and there they was! So he tuck a few and th'owed 'em on the men a-cuttin' on the tree, and all to oncet the chips flewed back where they come from and mended up the tree.

And the lil boy kept sayin' over and over, "Drop down, my cinduh seed, mend up my good tree. Mend up, mend up."

And fast as the men cut 'em out, the chips'd fly back into place and mend up the tree like it was 'fo the lil boy climb it.

And the lil boy thought 'bout his dogs he had left at home, and he begin saying to himself:

Hi, Bark and Berry,  
Jupiter and Kerry,  
Darker-in-de-mawnin'!  
Why don't chu come along?

Then he begin to call the dogs out loud, while the axes made the chips fly, and he dropped cinduh seed, and they made the chips fly back into the tree.

Come on, Bark and Berry,  
Jupiter and Kerry,  
Darker-in-de-mawnin'!  
Come on-n-n, on, on!  
Come on! Come on!

And jes as the lil boy was dropping his last cinduh seed, here come his dogs, and they jes flew into them men what was chopping down the tree and et 'em up, head and feet. That's what Bark done, and what Berry and Kerry and Darker-in-de-mawnin', all done.

And the lil boy went on back home, and his dogs galloped at his heels.

How many dogs? Didn't I count 'em?

Well, ever one of 'em was chock full of choppers they had et.

# The Gray Casket

I ain't been back to Selmer now in forty years, and I reckon I'll never go back. They tell me things has changed and I wouldn't recognize the place. The swimming hole's been dredged out, the streets has pavement on 'em, and there's gas stations on most every corner. The old stores on Main Street are tore down, and in their places are A & P's, and five-and-tens. The apple orchard what used to stand next to the graveyard is cut down, and new houses are standing there.

That's what people tell me what's been in Selmer, and with the orchard gone and all, it jes wouldn't seem like the old home town. In spring, if I'm where there's apple trees a-blooming, is when I feel it most. Seems like I can jes smell the old place, and see Uncle Luke, and his wife, Aunt Harriet; and old man Abrams.

Uncle Luke was an old colored man what made his living digging graves, and Abrams was the undertaker, so when Uncle Luke wasn't digging graves he was in the undertaking shop doing odd jobs. Abrams never paid Uncle Luke nothing for working 'round the shop. I reckon Abrams figgered that if he threw all the grave digging to Uncle Luke, he ought to work 'round the place in his spare time. Anyhow that's the way it was, and in a little town like that you know how a boy has a hankering to hang 'round places, 'specially a undertaking shop where dead people are brought in.

At first when old man Abrams seen me hanging 'round he'd run me off, and then one day he asked me to run a errand for him. After that he'd have little things for me to do, and directly I was putting in about all my time at the place. He was a stingy old codger, and I reckon I worked

there over a year before he began giving me a dollar a week—but Law, how I worked for that dollar!

Uncle Luke must've been way over seventy at the time, but nobody knowed how old he was, and he didn't neither. He was real humble, and all bent over from digging so many graves. His hair was pure white and kinked so tight that it looked like a wool mat stretched over his skull. He was as black as they come, and his eyes was so brown that even the whites was brown too.

Uncle Luke was one of the old-timey Negroes. He called all white men Cap'n, and he always took off his hat when he met a white man on the street, and bowed three or four times, and said, polite-like, "Mornin', Cap'n, I hopes you is feelin' good this mornin'."

After I'd been working for Abrams regular, I'd go to all the funerals to help out. The people would stand 'round the grave while the preacher said a prayer, and maybe somebody would testify 'bout the dead, and back in the edge of the apple orchard I could see Uncle Luke a-waiting for his turn. He'd be standing there with his spade in his hands, and after the people got in their buggies and drove off, Uncle Luke would come out and throw in the dirt, and level a little mound on top of the grave, and fix the wreaths and flowers nice and purty.

We had to pass the apple orchard coming and going, and I always thought when it came my time to be carried to the graveyard I hope it's in the spring when the orchard is full of blooms and smelling sweet and fine.

Uncle Luke and Aunt Harriet had six or seven younguns, but they'd all been gone for many's the year, and Uncle Luke said he never heard from none of them or knowed even where they was at. Aunt Harriet was ailing and never had much strength, but she managed to get to her church 'most every Sunday. White people liked 'em both, but you know how it is. Maybe at Christmas time people passed



'round baskets of food and such 'mongst the colored families, and maybe they'd give Uncle Luke some old clothes now and then, but they was all so busy with their own affairs they didn't bother much 'bout nobody else.

One day I walked in the storeroom at the undertaking shop, and I seen Uncle Luke a-looking at one of the new caskets. This was a fine casket all covered with gray plush and with silver handles and trimmings. Cost 'bout two hundred dollars. Uncle Luke put his hand on one of the handles, and he felt the fine plush with his fingers, and he opened and shut the lid. On the lid was two silver plates. One of them was carved "At Rest," and the other one was blank for the name of the person what was to be buried in it.

When Uncle Luke seen me, he acted awful sheepish, and made some excuse, and hurried out of there. But 'bout a week later I found him doing the same thing again, and I said to him, "That's a nice casket, ain't it, Uncle Luke?" He said, "It sure is, Cap'n Willie, it sure is." Then before he went, Uncle Luke said, "I sure would like to have Aunt Harriet buried in that casket, Cap'n Willie, I sure would."

Now I had Uncle Luke's secret, and sometimes we'd talk about it. Uncle Luke would say he's going try and save some money so he can buy that casket and have it laid away so when his wife died she can have a nice burial.

I knew Uncle Luke wouldn't have a chance in the world. The poor old feller lived in a rickety little cabin at the edge of town, and he and his old woman didn't have half enough to eat, much less save anything, but he never complained to nobody.

Seem like Uncle Luke could never get that casket out of his mind, and every chance he got he'd be in the storeroom admiring it. I reckon the old feller was a-getting a little teched in the head, he was so old and crippled up. Then one morning a man found Uncle Luke lying dead in

the ditch 'longside the orchard. People figgered he had a stroke or something walking over to the cemetery and he jes lay there and died, nobody being 'round.

I helped carry Uncle Luke to his cabin and lay him on the bed. I sort of expected Aunt Harriet would carry on terrible, but she jes stood still, like she was in a dream, and didn't say a word or shed a tear. When we got ready to go, she asked me, real polite, would I stay a minute. I felt awful bad, but I stayed back, and she asked me where did they find Uncle Luke.

I told her all I knowed, and then she said: "You suppose Mister Abrams'd give Uncle Luke a funeral?"

I told her I didn't know, but I'd ask him.

Abrams got mad when I told him what Aunt Harriet said.

"I don't owe him a cent," he said. "I paid him all I owed him, and I been keeping him going all these years, giving him the jobs when I could've got a younger man."

I hated awful to tell Aunt Harriet what Abrams said, but I done it. She took it real good, and so the county took charge of the burying. They put Uncle Luke in a pine box, and the colored preacher and a few people went along, and they buried him in a scraggly corner in the Negro part of the graveyard.

Aunt Harriet didn't go to the burying. She had took to her bed. The county doctor went to see her and said he couldn't find much the matter, she was jes wore out, and the neighbors sort of looked after her between work.

Well, that fine gray casket lay in Abrams' shop till Ab Hostetter died. Hostetter was well fixed and of course he had a big funeral. The family picked out the gray casket and they had "Abner Hostetter" carved on the plate over the breast.

A couple nights after the Hostetter burying—it was moonlight, I remember—a feller driving past the graveyard

said he saw somebody digging at a grave. I knew there wasn't nobody digging there, but the next day I was in the storeroom, and hang me if that same gray plush casket wasn't setting there, only there wasn't no silver plate over the breast. I said to Abrams, "I thought Ab Hostetter was buried in that casket." Abrams looked mighty queer, and he frowned and said, "I had two of them caskets in stock and I brought out t'other one."

Seems funny to me 'cause I never seen no other gray casket in stock, but things go on till Miss Lucy Carter died, and they buried her in that gray casket and Abrams telegraphed for a silver plate and they had "Lucy" carved on the plate.

Two or three days after the Carter funeral I was working in the storeroom and I seen that gray casket again, and there ain't no plate over the breast. Abrams got real mad when I asked him when did he get this new gray casket? Seems like he ain't much good any more and he let me look after the work.

One night Jake Horton came driving up in his buggy, his horse all a-lather and him scared most to death. He was puffing and wheezing and he said he saw Uncle Luke at the graveyard.

"When I drove by, there he was, walking down from the fence with his shovel in one hand and his hat in t'other," Horton said. "He waved his hat for me to stop, but I whipped up the mare and she most jumped outen the shafts."

Of course nobody believed what Jake Horton said, him being a drinking man, but it reminded me of Aunt Harriet, and come morning I went to her place to see how she was. One of the neighbors met me at the door and told me Aunt Harriet died 'bout twelve o'clock last night.

It looked like the county was going to bury Aunt Harriet, too, like they did Uncle Luke, 'cause she ain't got no

money nor nothing. But I asked Abrams if we're going to give her a funeral, and he told me to go and get the body in the hearse and bring it to the shop. Then he told me to get the body ready and put it in a pine box and we'd bury her next day.

That night was the terriblest time I ever put through in my life. About eleven o'clock a storm came up, and the building rocked and rattled, and lightning crashed all 'round. I heard a big crash in the storeroom, and me and Abrams ran in there, and we saw that the gray casket had fell on the floor. When another big flash came, over by where Aunt Harriet was laying, me and Abrams both turned 'round, and we saw Uncle Luke standing there in a cloud of smoke, all stooped over, with his hat in his hand like he wanted to talk to us.

Abrams let out a awful moan and ran back to his bedroom, and I ran to mine. The next morning Abrams didn't get out of bed. He called me and told me to put Aunt Harriet in the gray casket and order a silver plate with "Aunt Harriet" carved on it.

I was plenty glad to do it, and I got up a real good funeral for Aunt Harriet, and buried her beside Uncle Luke. Before the burying I had the whole corner of the graveyard cleaned up, all the brambles cut out, and everything fixed up good. Most everybody in town came to the funeral.

I reckon I jes soured on my job, and 'fore long I left Selmer and ain't been back since. People what's been there tell me that gray casket ain't never come back no more and Uncle Luke ain't never come out of his grave neither.

## Hot Peppers

My pappy was crazy about hot peppers, but he couldn't ever get 'em to grow. He always wanted ma to use peppers in pickling, seasoning, and just straight eating, but we had to buy our supply from the neighbors or from the markets in town. Queer thing, he'd set some out, and they'd come up all right, but seems like before long they'd just peter out.

One day when Aunt Drusilla was paying us a visit, pappy broached the subject of hot peppers to her. "What's the dope on hot peppers?" he asked. "Do you have to hold your mouth a certain way when you plant 'em, or am I mixed up on the wrong quarter of the moon?"

Aunt Drusilla listened while pappy explained how he had planted peppers, and how something must be wrong, because he had never grown even a tiny little baby pepper. "Do you plant the peppers yourself?" Aunt Drusilla asked, and pappy said sure, he planted 'em himself. "That's the trouble," said Aunt Drusilla. "You are an even-tempered and God-fearing man. You could never get peppers to make. Peppers has got to be planted by somebody with a high temper—the hotter the temper, the better the peppers."

This of course was news to pappy, and he began to understand why he'd had no luck. "Rufe is the boy for it," he said to ma and Aunt Drusilla. "If there's anybody with a meaner disposition and a nastier temper than that Rufe, I've never met the feller, yet."

Rufe is my oldest brother, and pappy sure told the truth when he said Rufe has an ugly disposition. Of course I'd always stand by Rufe, and see him through thick and thin, but he can get himself into more jams on account of that nasty temper of his than you could shake a stick at. I think sometimes he just hates himself, but he takes it out

kicking the dog, chunking rocks at the rooster, and pushing people around that are littler than him.

Pappy called Rufe in and told him he wanted him to go out right away and plant peppers in part of the garden. Rufe said he'd get started on the peppers in the morning, that it was getting dark, and he was fixing to quit work for the day. "I mean right now," pappy said, bringing his fist down on the table with a bang.

Well Rufe he growled and he snorted, and he growled some more, and he swore that he'd plant the ding-busted peppers but that's the last thing he would do around this old dump. He went into the garden and kept getting madder and madder. He'd stomp and kick in the dirt, and then he'd plant a few peppers. I never saw him so sore, planting them peppers out there in the dark and him hungry as a horse and knowing supper was getting cold and the rest of us kids was eating it all up. Me and my two other brothers would run out once and a while and say: "Would you like us to serve you your supper in the field?" He would cuss and run us all the way back to the house.

Anyway he got the peppers planted, and what I mean is planted good, because when they began coming up pappy saw right away that he was going to have the best crop of hot peppers that anybody ever raised.

Them peppers just growed and growed. They growed up to the size of small trees, ten or twelve feet high. And was they hot? They was so hot that when it rained on the garden the water boiled and went up in clouds of steam. There was no need to hoe 'em, because the peppers burned all the weeds out of the ground. When the peppers began to ripen they smouldered and shined like chunks of red-hot iron.

When they was ready to pick, pappy put on a heavy coat, a pair of goggles, and took a bucket and a pair of tongs and went to the pepper patch to get a dozen pods.

It took all night for them peppers to cool down, and pappy knowed that he had set a world record for peppers with pep. He experimented in different ways, and discovered that them peppers not only had zip and punch, but had some other qualities all their own.

There was an even dozen unmarried women past forty in our neighborhood. Three of them was widows and nine was old maids. They wasn't unmarried because of the surplus of female population, no, sir, because there was fourteen single and unattached males in the community. I never knowed what was the matter with them people, but it looked like there wasn't going to be any more weddings except among the real young folks. The widows and old maids and old bachelors would always come to the church socials and the school parties and the other neighborhood doings, but there just wasn't nothing in the shape of romance that ever come from it. Pappy said the women didn't have git-up-and-git, but ma said it was because the men-folks didn't have any pep and vinegar to 'em.

"Somebody ought to give them old bachelors a kick in the pants," ma said, "or put a bug in their coffee, or something, to make he-men out of 'em."

Seems like this gave pappy an idee, because right away he was out in the summer kitchen, picking seed from his pepper pods. He got my sister Janie to make some taffy-candy, and whilst it was still hot, pappy ground up the pepper seeds and mixed it in the taffy. When the taffy cooled down some, pappy greased his hands with butter and pulled the taffy till it was white and mellow and then he cut it up into little bars. He didn't let anybody into his secret plans except me.

In a couple of days there was a party at the schoolhouse. Pappy put the taffy-candy in a poke and took it along. When it came time for refreshments, I put the taffy on a plate and passed it around, being careful to offer it only

to the widows and old maids. There was so much other eats that nobody seemed to notice what I had done.

I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw what begun to happen. Them old maids and widows became the life of the party. They usually sat around like wallflowers, talking to themselves and pretending not to notice the menfolks, but now everything was different. They jumped up off their chairs and started milling around the men, talking fit to kill, rolling their eyes, and jerking their heads from side to side like a sixteen-year-old girl at her first party. And such tittering and giggling, I'm telling you I couldn't believe it.

Each of those old girls centered on one of the bachelors, telling him how handsome he was, and all such stuff. I thought I'd die from laughing, and I saw pappy back in a corner trying to keep from busting his sides. He tipped me a big wink to keep my mouth shut, and I sure didn't give the trick away to nobody. Ma kept staring at pappy and frowning fit to kill. If she knew what was at the bottom of all this, she didn't say nothing, but I knew well she was doing some powerful thinking.

Those women got up so much pep that the young single fellows and even the old married men began asking 'em to dance, and did the married women and young girls get sore! Those dames that always thought they was the belles of the ball had to take back seats. The young girls gathered in the cloakroom and began crabbing like everything. One of 'em said this must be a fossil resurrection. Then the married women began dragging their husbands off home, and I know they caught the very devil for acting up like that with the old maids and widows. Melisse Williams, who must of weighed 190 pounds, had more fun than anybody else, I reckon. She concentrated on Tom Tucker, a rich old cuss about fifty years old, and she wouldn't let him get away from her. Tom didn't seem to put up much



resistance because I saw 'em holding hands between dances out in the hall. When the fiddlers played a love song, all the old girls would hum and sing the words whilst they was dancing.

After the party the old bachelors didn't make another move. Seems like when they got away from the women the attraction didn't work. So in about a week pappy gave a stag party and invited all the old bachelors. Said he wanted to help 'em celebrate their single blessedness. He ground up some pepper seeds and mixed it in the corn liquor what he passed around. Deacon Green wouldn't drink because he was a good churchman and a teetotler. Before the party was an hour old, the men began making sly remarks about how nice it would have been if "the girls" was here, and it was just too bad that the girls had to miss so much fun.

Pappy was fixed for that because he had "the girls" all waiting at a neighbor's house, and he sent me over to invite 'em to come and join the party. I reckon before the evening was over there was eleven engagements ready to be announced. Deacon Green was the only one who held out in spite of all Reba Matthews could do. Pappy had a talk with Reba and gave her some of the pepper-seed candy. In a few days the Deacon called on Reba, and she treated him to four or five pieces of candy. Then, whilst he was digesting the candy, she sidled up alongside of him on the sofa and began showing him the pictures in her family album. I don't know what happened, but next day the Deacon called on pappy and said Reba was insisting that he marry her, and being a man of honor and high standing in the church, he guess he would have to go through with it.

There was an even dozen weddings in June, and about a year later the population increased by eleven new citizens. Looked like the Deacon was holding out again.

## Devil's Cure

Back when Cleveland was pres-i-dent and they warn't no roads, much less no railroads, nor ways of getting 'round, we hadn't no doctors within fifty mile and no way getting to 'em or them getting to us, and a man had to make out best he could. We farmed a little in the cove, hunted most all winter, and yarbed it spring and fall. I still believe they's no better medicine for a body than good yarbs, iffen you know what's what and how to use 'em.

Folks was allus a-looking for new yarbs and trying 'em out, and if somebody found a new cure he was good 'bout telling his neighbors. Take the time Granny Harkins had the misery in both knees and the pennyroyal didn't do no good—but I was fixing to tell you 'bout the time we was yarbing in the ivy thickets on yon side of Brown Mounting.

I was a young feller then, but couldn't do much good account of just getting over a broken leg bone, which lamed me up, and I didn't have no strength agin I had walked a fur piece.

The ivy kept getting thicker and thicker, and we was going single file. Roy Branch was a-leading us, and Bill Simms, and Carl Sullins, and me was a-follering. Looked like we couldn't get much further when all to oncet we smell smoke. Thinks I, this country is too rough for bear hunters even, and who'd be having a fire here'bouts? The further in the thicket we went, the stronger the smoke got, and then we got down on all fours and crawled along the critter runs, it was that thick. In a couple minutes there was a little clearing and in the center of it a enorm'us pit—musta been thirty-foot acrost.

Roy pulls up and says it seems a quare place to build a campfire. The smoke was a-coming outen the pit, and a

good whiff of it near strangled a body—smelled like sulphur and brimstone and extract of polecat all stewed together. We didn't have no guns, only our yarb bags. I admit we-all was a bit skeerish, but says Roy, "The Devil hates a coward," and in the pit we goes. At the bottom we sees the hole of a cave running back into the mounting; looked like a 'banded miky mine.

Standing there in the pit seems to me I could hear something in the thicket saying, "Go back—go back." Now we seed the smoke is coming outen the cave in puffs-like, and the smoke follers the top of the hole, so's we can stoop down and walk along under the terrible stink. As I say, I was at the end of the percession, but jes same I had a quare feeling 'long my back like hair rising, or goose pimples pimpling.

Atter we'd gone 'bout thirty-forty feet in the cave, we seed a big fire ahead, and jes 'bout time we seed it, there come a moaning and a sighing, like as if some lost soul was praying for deliv'rance. 'Bout that time we-all lit outen there in a hurry. The others jes run over me, and I had to hobble out bringing up the rear agin. The boys says we better go back to the cove and get help, 'cause looked like 'twas no tother than Old Nick himself there in that'ar cave.

Reckon the boys forgot all 'bout me in their hurry to get back to the cove, and I jes got to thinking it over, and I thinks to myself—now that devil-critter don't mean no harm, 'cause iffen he did, he sure woulda jumped us when we was in the cave. So I turns 'round and heads back for the pit and stands there a minute, and I reckon the ole Imp knowed I was there, 'cause pretty soon I hears him a-saying, soft-like: "Come in here and talk to me, mister. I ain't meaning no harm. Fack, mebbe I do something for you."

He kept on saying things like that, a-pleading and a-pitiful-like, and so I limps into the cave, up to where that

fire was a-blazing, and—eygad a'mighty I never seed such a sight in my borned days, and hope never to agin.

Right away I knowed he was a ole He-Devil—nary a imp or hant. He musta been eight or ten feet tall, shaped like a man, you might say, but warn't a man. He had nary clothes, and his hide was all red and they was little blue fire darting outen him, and the smoke from that fire was most hideous and the stinkenest a man airy breathed. As I live, there was nary horns nor tail on the critter, but he had a long crooked nose that almost met the point of his chin, and his eyeballs jes looked like they woulda burn through a man. I seed right away he was chained to a big iron stake. They was a iron band 'round his middle with a ring in it, and a chain fastened to the ring with a big lock.

"Don't be afeered," says he. "I been a-waiting here for rescue nigh onto five hunner years. Iffen you'll do what I says, and get me loose afore them fellers come back with they dogs and guns, I'll do you a favor what you'll be thankful for so long as you live."

"How can I get you loose, and what's the favor?" says I, bold-like, seeing he's all clamped down.

"I'll tell you more about potent yarbs than airy man knows iffen you'll fish in the pool below Medden Falls and fotch the key outen the pool to unlock me."

I couldn't see as I could lose, and off I hobbled to Medden Pool, and sure 'nough, in a little dragging with my fingers I brought up a ole brass key.

I squats outa range while he told me 'bout yarbs—funny names that I don't 'member, but he told me 'zactly what they looked like and where to find 'em, and how to use 'em, and what good they'd do. Jes to try out, I fotchted a couple leafs from the thicket, and rubbed my leg with one, and all the misery and stiffness went away and I could walk with nary a limp or hurt. Then I unlocked the ole He-Devil.

He took the other leaf, swallowed it, and—blast my hide—he was gone, and nothing but stink left in the place.

On the way home I heerd a crowd coming from the cove with dogs and guns—a-yelling and a-raising hell. I took the trail across Big Baldy, and they didn't see me, and I gathered a bagful of yarbs the Ole Devil told me 'bout, on the way home. Course the crowd didn't find nothing in the cave, and they all swore Roy, and Bill, and Carl was drunk. Nobody seemed to remember anything 'bout me being along.

I mixed up a batch of medicine in a sixty-gallon barrel, put it in bottles, and labeled it "Devil's Cure." It fixed up Granny Harkin's misery first crack, and next day she went and sawed wood with the menfolks. I 'spirimented with a pet rabbit, and he went 'round killing all the hounds in the cove, jes by kicking 'em with his hind laigs. Ma used some Cure fer furniture polish and danged iffen the furniture didn't sprout roots and grow to the floor.

I'd been a-sitting some with Mandy Jenkins, but never had much chance 'gainst Bud Gudger, who was a big han'-some feller, allus talking big talk 'bout what a fighter and hunter he was. Looked like Mandy was a-going to get spliced with Bud, and then I thought I'd try some Devil's Cure.

I dried some of the yarbs and, when Mandy wasn't looking, I sifted it into her snuff. She took a pinch and let out a awful sneeze, and—eygad—her face turned as ugly as a ole bobcat. After that Bud stayed away, and Mandy was glad enough to marry me. Then one day I sprinkled a little dried yarb on the ground back of the cabin. When Mandy stepped on it, her feet sizzled and smoked, and the ugliness jes drawed right into the ground. Then she was the pert'est gal in the hull cove. When she found out what happened, she was mad as hops 'bout Bud Gudger and all, and skeered I might put some in her snuff agin. Said if I didn't pour

out all the medicine and swear not to fool with it agin she'd leave me. Well I figgered Mandy was worth more'n the Devil's Cure, so I took the barrel to the ravine and poured it out.

You don't have to believe me, but jes go down yourself and see that hot water still spouting forty feet high in the ravine.

## Pot of Gold

Oncet when I was a young feller I take a ramblin' notion. I didn't have no job, and some feller say I oughta git out and find one. He say to hobo 'round the country and I'd find somethin' to do and maybe have some fun doin' it.

Well, I took his advice. I left home early one mornin' and I walked all day. I jes set my foots in the road and walked. Ever house I come to I axed if they had a little job of work for me, but they all say they ain't got nothin'. I jes kept on a-walkin' and a-stoppin' now and then to rest a lil bit.

After while I was 'bout four counties from home and no work ain't turned up yit. I begin to git sorta down at the mouth, but I ain't give up. I keeps on axin' and hopin' for the best.

One evenin' 'bout a hour by sun I was so tired I thought I'd fall down if I didn't git some place to sleep at. I was skeered to lay down in the woods. Them was black nights with jes a little new moon, and they was clouds layin' 'round a-threatenin' rain. I wa'n't particular what kind of shed I was under—jes so's I had shelter on a night like that.

The only house I seed in a fo-mile stretch was a two-story house with the winderlights out and the doors draggin' on they hinges. I thinks I'll stay there, but atter I sees nice furniture in it I reckons somebody lives there and I goes humpin' along down the road. Reckon I's gone 'bout a mile when I meets a white man and axes him can I sleep in his barn.

He say to me, "Black boy, I don't let no tramps sleep on my premises, but I'll give you five hunner dollars if you sleep in the big house you done passed."

I say, "Why you gwine gimme so much money to sleep in the house jes one night?"

The man say, "Well, it's hanted or witched or some-thin', and nobody won't stay in it. I know, 'most in my mind, that they's a pot of gold in it if I can find it. I'll give you the five hunner if you'll stay and ax the ghost where at it is when he come."

Then I say, "What kinda ghost is it?"

He say he don't know for sartin', that folks what has tried to stay there tells different tales 'bout it. Some of 'em say it's a tall woman dressed in white like a angel; some say it's a big black man with horns on his head; some say it's a big white hoss, and some say it's nothin' but a ole black cat.

Well, I been seein' hants off and on ever since I could 'member, but I didn't like 'em none atall. No suh! Not atall. I didn't want to spend no night watchin' for no hants, nuther, 'cause I was jes 'bout the tireddest I'd ever been, but five hunner dollars a heap of money. I told him I might go to sleep and not wake up when the trouble begin, but he say he wa'n't oneasy 'bout that. I fin'ly say I'd do it and went on back to the house.

When I got there, night was a-fallin', and the ole house looked worser'n it did fust time I seed it. I went in, howsomever, and shet the doors. Soon as I had that done, I crawled in the bed and went to sleep.

I don't know how long I slept, but when I waked up, there was a lil streak of moonlight layin' 'crost the bed and in that lil light was a big black cat. He was layin' on my foot; so I kicked him and told him to git off. He growled at me and say, "Who do you think you is?"

I was mighty sleepy, but that woke me up and I set up and say, "What the hell?"

"Hell's right," the cat say. "I wonder who *you* is."



'Bout that time I decides the cat is a sho 'nough hant and I 'members what the man tole me. I say, "What you want here, anyhow?"

He say, "What *you* want?"

I begin to git wide awake then and I knowed no fambly cat gwine set on nobody's feet and talk to him. I say, "I knows you's a hant, and it ain't no use tryin' to fool me no more."

The cat looks at me and say, "Black man, I ain't tryin' to fool you none, but you're sho lible fool you'self some."

I couldn't stand it no more; so I hopped outa bed and flewed. I reckon I made better time then these auttymobiles does now when I runned th'ough the swamps and bushes.

After while I give plumb out and I set down on a log to rest. I knowed I'd left that black cat five mile behind, but when I looks 'round there he is settin' on the t'other end of the log. He look at me and grin and say, "Buddy, that was some run!"

I say, "Cat, you ain't seen nothin' yet," but he yells at me to wait a minute, 'cause I done forgot somethin'. I stops and say, "I ain't forgot a thing, and I wish I knowed what you's botherin' me for."

He say with a big sickly grin, "There, now, you *has* 'membered, and you axed me so I'll have to tell you. They's a pot chock full of gold in that house, and I'll show it to you if you'll go back to the house with me. But you'll have to carry me 'cause I's so tired."

I 'spected the cat was lyin' to me, but I thought there was nothin' to lose. I makes up my mind quick when I thinks 'bout business, so I say, "Well, come on and git on my shoulder and let's go back."

First along the cat was so light I can't feel him atall, but he keep on gittin' heavier and heavier till he weighed much as a full-growed man. 'Fore we got there he was so

heavy I couldn't hardly make it atall. I say to him, "Hey, can't you git a little bit lighter?"

He say, "I can when I'm not so tired, but the more you walks the more tired I git."

That made me mad and I say, "What about *me*?"

We argies back and fo'th, and he get heavier and heavier. Last he say, "Looka here, I think you's wonned the gold, but don't you go and git skeered and leave before you git it."

I say I won't, and then he gits light again as we travel. 'Fore we got to the house the lightnin' commence to flash, and the thunder commence to roll, and the wind blowed like it was tryin' to blow us away. I gitten skeered, but the cat say, "Now, 'member, don't git skeered lessen you don't want that gold. I'll turn you over to some other folks 'fore you can git it nohow."

When we git to the house, the cat say, "Go up to the attic." I went up and when we got there, he say, "Meet my friend Mr. Spider."

I nearbout passed out in my tracks. Standing there was a spider tall as a man. It wa'n't no real, livin' spider. It was the spider's hide, and had big red eyes and a mouth full of long sharp teeth. It say, "Come," and I went.

We went down to the second floor, and the spider say, "Meet my friend Mr. Skinniken."

I nearbout dropped daid. There stood the skinniken of a tall man without a rag of clothes on his bones. The skinniken say, "Come," and I went with him down to the cellar.

When we got down there, the skinniken say, "Meet my friend Miss Gooley."

Lemme tell you, Miss Gooley looked worser'n any the others. She wa'n't no skinniken; she was a ole woman what lately die. She had on the grave cloes with the rag still tied under her chin, and her eyes was green and looked like glass. She ain't say a word, but she go over in the corner

and pull up a rock and hand the skinniken the pot she pull out from under it. The skinniken give the pot to the spider, and the spider give it to the cat, and the cat hands it to me and say, "Let's me and you git outa here."

Well, suh, we went up the steps, and the thunder and lightnin' and wind was a-ragin'. The cat say to me, "You git goin' in a hurry and don't you look back. Hurry now, and git as far as you can in a minnit."

I taken that pot and I flewed, and jes as I got outen the yard the lightnin' hit that house and level her off to the ground! In the flare I seed the pot was full of yeller gold. I went faster and faster and when it got so dark I couldn't see where I was goin' I stumbled and fell in the creek. I crawled out all right, but I drapped the pot.

I set on the bank till come daylight, and I went back in the water lookin' for my gold. I didn't even find the pot, much less'n the gold, and when I got back home they say I done drempt it. I knowed I hadn't, but I knowed, too, that I'd had ramblin's enough, so I stuck 'round home from then till now.

## Notes

### *Bundle of Troubles*

Told to W. E. Hennessee by Harry Hobson of Cleveland, N. C., who heard the story from one of his Negro farmhands, Jonathan Hobson. Jonathan, about seventy years of age, is a son of one of the Hobson slaves. He and his wife have a large family of children.

### *Pappy's 'Tater Patch*

Told to Samuel E. Kluttz by E. R. Hawkins, a farmer of McDowell County, N. C. Hawkins raised potatoes on his farm, which contained a number of the mountain knobs peculiar to that section of McDowell County. Usually the knobs are heavily eroded and useless for cultivation.

### *The Stranger's Last Possum*

Told by Homer Corn, a Henderson County mountaineer, to Frank Massimino. Henderson County caters to the tourist trade. It has many summer camps, tourist homes, and hotels. The tourists sometimes engage the services of local guides in hunting deer, fox, and opossum. This story illustrates the attitude of many of the local residents toward the "tourist fellers." Often represented by sophisticated writers as backward and naïve, the Carolina mountaineer usually is able to look after his own interests in his intercourse with strangers.

### *Trocea*

Told to Mrs. Travis Jordan by Joe Sanford, an elderly farmer who moved from eastern North Carolina to Person County. He claimed that Trocea worked on his father's Craven County farm and that the facts as stated in the story are true. Sanford said that Trocea's spirit followed him wherever he went and that he could often distinguish Trocea's voice in the hooting of an owl; that he often felt the half-breed's presence, and more than once Trocea appeared to him to warn of impending danger.

### *Cheesebox Church*

Told to James Larkin Pearson by Judson Poole, a Negro who formerly lived in Granville County; a tall tale in explanation of his spiritual backsliding.

*Putting the Fixment on Mr. Bullfrog*

Told to Mrs. Travis Jordan by Tobe Street, an elderly Negro of Person County. Tobe swore that he could talk to the "woods critters" and understand their language. He claimed to be more than one hundred years of age. He had been married three times and had twenty-two children. Tobe was proud of the fact that his children and grandchildren filled six benches at the meetinghouse when they attended church together.

*The Sharpest Saw*

Told to Mary A. Hicks by William Bagwell, a white man who lived in Apex, Wake County, N. C. He has been a sawyer, millwright, and machinist since childhood. He said (with his tongue in his cheek) that he had worked with this wonderful saw in Pitt County, N. C.

*The Whang Doodle*

Told to Mrs. Adyleen G. Merrick by Alex White, a Negro who lived near Lynn, Polk County, N. C. White claimed that the experience with the Whang Doodle occurred while he was a boy on his father's small farm in Polk County.

*John Henry of the Cape Fear*

This version of the John Henry legend was told to T. Pat Matthews by Glasgow McLeod, an aged Negro of Lillington, N. C. McLeod claimed that he knew where John Henry was born in Harnett County on the Cape Fear River, above Lillington, and that he went to work with Henry on the Santa Fe Railway; he said he witnessed the race between Henry and the steam hammer and was present when Henry was buried.

*A Night at Pickey's*

Told to Katherine Palmer by Dr. Clyde Thomas, a physician of Siler City, N. C. Miss Palmer spent several years in Chatham County, where she collected a number of local tales. This story is based on mysterious happenings said to have occurred at the old George Hanner Place in Chatham County. Hanner, the Pickey Bailey of the story, is now dead, and the house is occupied by Mr. Jesse Alred.

*Jenny-Mule*

Told to Katherine Palmer by Mrs. George White, librarian of Bonlee, N. C., who had heard this story concerning a bachelor farmer living near Siler City.

*The Cooter and the Alligator*

Told to W. E. Hennessee by Walter Murphy, Salisbury, N. C., politician, lawyer, and oft-time member of the General Assembly. Murphy, a great storyteller, ascribed this sermon to a Negro preacher at a small country church in Rowan County.

*Miss Nannie*

Another Chatham County story by Katherine Palmer. This one was related by Foust Lane of Mount Vernon Springs. Mr. Lane is a farmer; his father was once sheriff of Chatham County. He claims the characters were real though they have been given fictitious names.

*Bear Hunt in Reverse*

This modified version of the Munchausen tale was told to Mrs. Travis Jordan by a Negro huckster at Durham, N. C., who said he had formerly lived in New Bern and was well acquainted with the Uncle Aaron of the story.

*Sure-Shot Bessie*

M. V. Galloway, a native of Burke County, N. C., told this story to Stanly Combs. Galloway, who was fond of hunting and laid great stock by his dogs and guns, had a fund of hunting stories. This tall tale is ascribed to the mountainous section of northern Burke County.

*Sisterene*

Told to Mrs. Travis Jordan by the family's laundress, who declared that she was divinely appointed a Sisterene and made a brief sojourn in Heaven. She told the story with great conviction and to whoever would listen.

*Rode by Witches*

Told to Mary A. Hicks by Benjamin E. Rogers, octogenarian, of Raleigh, N. C. The theme is common in eastern Carolina ghost lore.

*Quality Folks*

Told to Helen J. Baker by Martha Pruitt, an aged Negress, who said she was born in slavery and was a small child on a Johnston County plantation when Sherman's soldiers raided the house and premises, and when the events described took place.

*The Headless Hant*

This tale by Nancy Watkins was one of the ghost stories told by Dez Foy, a bound Negro boy, to the Watkins children before the kitchen fire in their home at Madison, N. C.

*Old Skinny*

Told to Mary A. Hicks by a Negro prisoner in the North Carolina Central Prison at Raleigh, who said that the experiences described befell a friend of his in Sampson County.

*Jake Sells a Dog*

Told by J. A. Starling of Seagrove, N. C., to William E. Williams. Starling, a native of Cumberland County, said that Jake came to his father's house to sell a dog, which his father spurned but suggested that perhaps Jake could sell it to one of the Negro hands. Starling, then a boy, went with Jake and was a witness to the sale of the dog, which took place in a cotton field in Cumberland County.

*The Bride and Groom of Pisgah*

The legend of the Bride and Groom of Pisgah is well known in and about Asheville. When snow covers the north side of Pisgah Mountain, the rocky declivities give the appearance of a bride and a groom. The narrative is localized in the vicinity of Pisgah and the neighboring ridges, peaks, and coves. It was reconstructed by W. C. Hendricks, chiefly from an account by the late Wiley O'Kelly, who was born and lived in the Stony Fork section, just north of the mountain's base.

*Woman Trouble*

Told to Mrs. Travis Jordan by Blanche Robertson, who said the Negro of the tale, Caesar Burton, worked for her for a number of years. Caesar believed that his twisted neck was visited upon him because of his wicked conduct. He said that all of the events described in the story actually occurred and that while he was on his way home after the fight in the church he was stricken in some mysterious manner and when he recovered consciousness his head was twisted to one side.

*Uncle Heber's Flytrap*

Told to James S. Beaman by William Wilson, drawbridge tender in the Brice's Creek section of Craven County. This tall tale is based upon the fertile land, the Venus's-flytrap, and a lazy character.

*Animals Has Got More Sense than Men*

Told to Dudley W. Crawford by Dick Webb, Forest City, and Lee Morris, Marion, N. C. The fanciful events described are typical of the hunting tales which mountain men love to swap while they are holed up together as they were on this rainy day.

*Dot-and-Dash Bradshaw*

James Larkin Pearson heard this story from a retired trainman, traveling on an annual pass, while the two were fellow passengers on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad.

*The Devil's Mudhole*

Another devil story, this one was told to Mrs. Travis Jordan by Blanche Robertson, who heard it from Seth Porter, an elderly farmer from the Virginia mountains section who peddled vegetables in town. He was married to Lucindy of the tale and had a large family of children. Needless to say, he became a confirmed tobacco chewer in his later life and may have used the tale to explain how he contracted the habit.

*Hillbilly Champeen*

This story, by Samuel E. Kluttz, is a favorite in the rural sections of McDowell County. It concerns a local character, widely known for his tobacco-spitting accomplishments.

*Them Science Fellers*

A Henderson County ghost story concerning a shack which stood near the Southern Railway tracks a short distance south of Hendersonville. The story, as told to Frank Massimino, concerned a family said to have come from South Carolina.

*Blood Apples*

Told to Mrs. Adyleen G. Merrick by Cora Westbrook, a Negro maid employed in Charlotte. According to Cora, the story was related to her by her aunt, a servant on the place described, near Pineville, N. C. A somewhat different version of the same tale was heard by Mrs. Merrick in Polk County.

*Thankful for Blessings*

Told to Katherine Palmer by Mrs. Foust Lane, of Mount Vernon Springs, N. C., who ascribes the locale to a rural community near Pittsboro, Chatham County.



*Magic Horse Tracks*

Written by Leonard Rapport, this story is founded on the common version of the origin of the magic horse tracks, which are still visible near Bath, N. C.

*Cinduh Seed in You Pocket*

Told to Nancy Watkins by Evelyn Franklin Robbins, a Negro schoolteacher, who said she heard it from Aunt Bettzanne, an old Negro servant of Madison, N. C. The tale was recalled by Miss Watkins as one she had heard, when a child, from Dez Foy.

*The Gray Casket*

Cora L. Bennett heard this tale from her mother's uncle, who, when a boy, had worked for an undertaker in eastern North Carolina.

*Hot Peppers*

Told to T. Pat Matthews by Milton A. Matthews, Angier, N. C. The latter was reared on a tobacco farm and has a fund of farm stories which he loves to tell.

*Devil's Cure*

Jack M. Greene heard this story from several sources in the mountainous sections of Mitchell County. Stories of the devil chained in a cave, and of magic herbs, are common in the western North Carolina mountains.

*Pot of Gold*

An old ghost story current in many variations throughout the state and told in this version to Mary A. Hicks by Benton McCoy, Negro, of Cary, Wake County, N. C.

